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JOE PHENIX IN CHICAGO; OR,



THERE WAS WILD EXCITEMENT OVER THE SHOWER OF COIN. THE NEW SERIO-COMIC HAD MADE A DECIDED HIT.

Joe Phenix in Chicago;

OR,

The Serio-Comic Detective.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF THE "JOE PHENIX" NOVELS,
"THE FRESH OF FRISCO" TALES, THE
"DICK TALBOT" ROMANCES,
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LOST IN CHICAGO.

THE through Express train on the Erie Railway from Chicago to New York, and due in the metropolis in the morning, arrived in the busy, bustling, manufacturing city of Paterson, N. J., on time, its last stop before reaching New York.

In the smoking-car, enjoying a fragrant cigar, sat a middle-aged gentleman, stout in figure; and well preserved, whose nationality could be guessed at a glance, for he was evidently an Englishman, and a man upon whom fortune had smiled.

Prosperity was apparent in his dress, his face, his manner.

Into the car came another transplanted Briton, almost a counterpart of the first.

Stout in stature, with a "corporation" aldermanic in its proportions, a ruddy complexion, and a general air which suggested that the man was at peace with himself and all the world.

The new-comer came in at the front door, and as the passenger, whom we have described, was sitting in the front seat, the pair got a good view of each other.

There was a mutual recognition.

"Bless me!" the new-comer exclaimed, "can this be Carroll Berkeley?"

"The same! Why, MacKensie, I had no idea of meeting you in this country. I thought you were in India," the other replied, shaking hands warmly with the gentleman, and making room for him on the seat.

Not surprising the pair were glad to see each other, for they had been brought up in the same town, and had been constant companions until they came to man's estate, when they were compelled by the necessities of business to take different roads in life.

Both came of wealthy families, whose money had been acquired in trade; and, as they had started with all the advantages on their side, it was no wonder that they had accumulated handsome fortunes.

"India did not agree with me, and as there was a good opening for a branch house in New York, I came on to take charge of it."

"But, what are you doing here in this country—on a pleasure trip? for I read in the newspapers that you had retired from active business life."

"Yes; my brother, Marshall, and myself have been making a trip around the world—you remember Marshall, of course?"

"Oh, certainly! Is he on the train?" MacKensie asked.

"Alas! my unfortunate brother!" the Englishman exclaimed, with a mournful shake of the head. "I do not know where he is."

"Is that possible?"

"Yes, he is lost—lost in Chicago!"

"Bless me! but I do not really understand how this can be!" MacKensie exclaimed, decidedly perplexed.

"A few words will explain. As I told you, Marshall and myself started from London to make a trip around the world."

"We had a delightful time, and arrived at San Francisco without meeting with any disagreeable incidents."

"There a difference of opinion arose between Marshall and myself. I wanted to make a trip to Southern and Northern California, taking about three weeks, while he was anxious to push on to Chicago, so as to have more time to devote to the great Fair."

"Neither one of us was inclined to give way, and so we finally agreed to separate, I to make my California trip, and he to go to the Fair, and there await my coming."

"This plan we carried out."

"During the three weeks I heard from him three times, but when I arrived at Chicago and sought him at his hotel, I was told that

he had gone away two days before, without saying a word to any one in the hotel in regard to his intentions."

"Well, that was strange."

"Yes; his baggage was all in his room, and he hadn't said a word to anybody in the hotel to indicate that he was going away."

"On the contrary, he had informed both the landlord and the clerks of the agreement which we had made, and said he would be glad when I arrived, as he was tired of going around alone."

"Ah, yes; that was very natural under the circumstances."

"I was completely puzzled, for I had written him as to the exact day when I would come; in fact, had calculated to the very moment almost, and was only some thirty minutes late; so, that he should not be on hand to greet me was something extremely strange."

"It is no wonder that you do not know what to make of it."

"The only reasonable explanation was that he had taken a trip somewhere and was detained; but then, if that was the case, the telegraph was at his service and a 'wire' would put me in possession of the facts at once."

"And as an experienced business man, he ought to have understood that," MacKensie observed.

"After thinking the matter over for awhile, I concluded to make a visit to the banking house, the Chicago correspondents of Brown Brothers, of London, upon whom our letters of credit were drawn."

"The gentleman in charge was a very fine fellow and received me in the most cordial manner."

"He had got quite well acquainted with Marshall, and was surprised to learn that he had left his hotel without saying where he was going, and informed me that Marshall had not said anything to him about going away."

"Then he made inquiries of the clerks, but to none of them had my brother spoken about making a trip; but a look at Marshall's account showed that two days before his check for five thousand dollars had been presented and cashed, as it seemed to be all right. The bearer, a very respectable-looking elderly gentleman, had explained that he had sold my brother a piece of property."

"Marshall, by the way, had been advised to invest some money in Chicago real estate, and, besides the necessary moneys for his expenses, had a couple of thousand pounds—about ten thousand dollars in United States money—at his command."

"Was the check all right?" MacKensie asked, suspiciously.

"Apparently it was, and yet there was something about the signature which gave me the impression that my brother had never written it."

"I told the bank people that I suspected it was a forgery, but frankly said that if the signature had been presented to me for inspection, without any explanation, I should undoubtedly have declared that it was my brother's signature."

"Then the case was given into the hands of the police, for by this time I had begun to be afraid that my brother had met with foul play."

"Marshall was always inclined to be somewhat gay when away from home, and go off on little larks, which never really amounted to anything, for my brother had a head like iron, and although on these occasions he drank a great deal of liquor, yet I never knew him to get so that he did not know what he was doing or to be unable to take care of himself."

"Yes, yes. I understand."

"A month went by, but no news; then, fearing the worst, I offered a reward of five hundred dollars and personally visited all the private detectives in the city to spur them up."

"A second month followed the first; still not the slightest clue was gained."

"Heartsick, I determined to tarry no longer, for I was now sorely afraid that my brother had been murdered and the assassins had managed the matter so carefully that their discovery was not possible."

"Don't give up the search yet!" MacKensie exclaimed. "There is a man here in

New York who has performed some wonderful feats in the detective line. Come with me, and I will introduce you."

"This man is a really marvelous fellow, and he has succeeded in unraveling some deep and dark mysteries of this kind after all the rest of the detectives had given up in despair."

"Oh, my dear Berkeley, a wonderful man is this Joe Phenix!"

CHAPTER II.

PHENIX TAKES THE CASE.

BERKELEY reflected for a few minutes.

"Well, I do not see any objection to my having a talk with the man, and learning his opinion on the subject."

"I will take you to his office; we will be apt to find him there if he is in town, for he is an early bird," MacKensie remarked.

"I have not had much experience with these detectives myself, but some of my acquaintances have, and from what I have been told I am satisfied that this Joe Phenix is much above the average man in his line."

By this time the train was running into the depot, which interrupted the conversation.

The pair crossed the ferry to the metropolis, and MacKensie conducted his companion to the detective's office in the Wall street district.

As the guide had anticipated, the man-hunter had arrived, and received his visitors with the quiet courtesy which ever characterized his manner.

Berkeley, a man of affairs, and a good judge of human nature, perceived at once that the detective was a superior man.

He explained the case.

Joe Phenix listened attentively, and spoke not until the tale was told; then he asked:

"Was any evidence discovered to show that your brother had invested in any real estate?"

"None, although all the real estate men in the city were visited, and the records searched. In fact, none of the brokers had even heard of my brother."

"And you have a suspicion that the check was a forged one?"

"Yes, I certainly do so think, although the imitation of my brother's signature was so good that I would be loth to go into a court to swear he did not write it."

The detective shook his head.

"I am afraid your brother has met with foul play," he observed. "Where the car-rion is there go the wolves and the vultures; where men with money are to be found there the rascals are sure to congregate."

"The Fair has drawn a great number of people to Chicago, and although the police and detectives of that city have done their best to protect the strangers within their gates, yet under the circumstances it has not been possible for them to spot every crook who has been attracted by the great Fair to take up his quarters in Chicago."

"Of course, it would not be possible, no matter how alert the police might be, or how skillful the detectives," Berkeley added.

"The weak point of the system of espionage is that the watchers cannot spot the foreign rascals," the detective explained. "All the prominent men and women of the home brood are tolerably well known to the detectives of the leading cities, but when it comes to the imported stock, then our men are at fault."

"Now, I judge that your brother has not fallen the victim of any of our own home crooks, for the game has been too skillfully worked, and is right in the line of some of these European rascals, who are more clever in arranging schemes of this kind than our home talent."

"You take an entirely different view of the case from the Chicago men," Berkeley announced. "They were inclined to believe that I was mistaken in regard to the check being a forgery. They thought it was a case of bunco, as you Americans call it."

"My brother, as I have said, was a hard drinker at times, and when he went on one of these larks had a habit of patronizing low places of amusement, and the police believe that in some of these places the bunco-men made his acquaintance, induced him to come with them, got him to sign the check, and then murdered him."

"Ah, yes; but bunco-men never play so desperate a game as that," the detective averred. "They rob but they never kill."

"Now, another point: did the investigation reveal that your brother had been in the habit of frequenting any places of popular resort where he would be apt to make the acquaintance of shady characters?"

"Yes; the detectives discovered that he was accustomed to spend two or three evenings a week in a music-hall, which is called 'the Glorious Alcazar,' situated a few blocks from the hotel where he resided," the Englishman answered.

"The Glorious Alcazar, eh? That is an odd name for a place of amusement. Alcazar is not uncommon, but the adding of the glorious to it is a decided novelty."

"It must be a new place, for, although I am well acquainted with Chicago, I never heard of the Glorious Alcazar before."

"I do not doubt that, for it is located in the 'Fair District,' and of course before the Fair there were no hotels or places of amusement in the neighborhood, although now there are a great number of both."

"What sort of a place is this Glorious Alcazar?" the detective asked. "From its name I should judge it was not a particularly reputable place of amusement."

"You are correct," the Englishman admitted; "it is a common kind of a music-hall; in fact, a sort of what you call in this country a beer-garden. There is a small stage, upon which the performers appear, assisted by an indifferent orchestra; there are a few regular seats, as in a theater, in front, then, back of these, a number of tables, with five or six chairs to each one, scattered through the auditorium."

"Yes, I understand; we have plenty of such places of amusement and guzzling in New York."

"My brother got in the habit of going to this place quite often, as the detectives ascertained."

"Did the detectives ascertain whether there was any particular performer in whom your brother took an interest—who was an attraction to draw him to the place?" Joe Phenix asked.

"They did proceed on this idea but were not able to learn anything."

"Is there a wine-room connected with this establishment where the visitors can make the acquaintance of the performers?" persisted the detective.

"Yes, and it was discovered that my brother was in the habit of going there, but the detectives could not discover that he was on particularly intimate terms with any of the performers."

"He spent his money freely, and treated the stage people, but did not seem to prefer one to another."

"Speculation in a case of this kind does not amount to much," the detective assumed, "but, to my thinking, it is probable that it was at this Glorious Alcazar your brother met the people who entrapped him, though it does not follow that any of the performers had anything to do with it."

"Another point: it may be that your brother, for some reason of his own, chose to go away for awhile, yet it seems improbable that he would remain absent for two months without communicating with you."

"Oh, I am quite satisfied that he would not do so!" the Briton asseverated.

"But, my dear Mr. Phenix, will you take this case?" he now urged. "Expense is no object, you know. I would gladly give a thousand to clear up the mystery, and ten thousand to bring to justice the murderers of my brother, if he really was done to death by assassins!"

"I will do the best I can for you and will leave for Chicago to-night."

On board the Chicago Express that night was the man-hunter and his aids

CHAPTER III.

THE SERIO-COMIC.

THE description which the Englishman had given of the music-hall called the Glorious Alcazar was singularly correct. It was a one-story frame building, run up in the cheapest manner.

The proprietor was a fat, middle-aged German, named Moses Grundbaum. He had

kept a small saloon in the West Side of Chicago for years, and was commonly believed to have accumulated a good bit of money; and, most certainly, the man ought to be well off, for he was parsimonious with his cash, and a closer man at a bargain it would be hard to find.

But the Glorious Alcazar had not made any money for its proprietor, and the prospect was poor enough of the German getting back the money which he had invested in the building and its outfit.

So, although the proprietor was usually a hail fellow—well-met with everybody, yet now he was disposed to do a great deal of grumbling.

"Dot Fair vas a fraut!" he was wont to declare a hundred times a day.

"Ach, Himmel! when dot Fair shuts mit her doors oop, der city of Chicago vill go broke, so quick as never vas, bet you your life on dot!"

A performance was given every afternoon and night at the music-hall, but only a handful of people attended the matinees, with the exception of Sunday, always the great theatrical day in Chicago.

At night there was usually half a house.

During the morning hours the place was deserted, and the one bartender had all he could do to keep awake.

It was on the morning of the second day after the meeting between the Englishman and the detective in New York City, that a tall, finely proportioned girl, with a strongly-marked and decidedly masculine face, made her appearance in the neighborhood of the music-hall.

She was neatly attired in a black walking-dress, a costly garment originally, but it had seen its best days, for it was beginning to show decided evidence of wear.

When she got in front of the Glorious Alcazar she halted, and surveyed the building. The structure was about fifty feet wide.

The saloon occupied twenty-five feet of the front, the passageway to the hall the remainder, and the theater itself was back of the saloon and entry.

As the girl halted, and looked at the saloon in an irresolute way, just as if she wanted to go in, but did not like so to do, a very odd-looking specimen of humanity sauntered out of the hallway, and, halting in the entrance, surveyed the girl with a knowing air.

The person was a fat fellow, attired in a shabby suit of black, which evidently had had so much hard wear that it could not reasonably be expected to hold together much longer.

He wore a silk hat, but as the appearance of the hat indicated that the wearer had been in the habit of sleeping in it, it did not improve his appearance.

The man was what the world at large stigmatizes as a bummer—a fat, jolly, greasy bummer.

He grinned in a good-natured way at the girl.

"Are you looking for anybody, lady?" he asked, in a peculiar, stilted, theatrical way, and, as he spoke, took off his hat and, with a sweeping wave of the hand, made a profound bow.

The young lady smiled, for there was something comic about the toper.

She returned his bow, though, with as much politeness as though he had been Chicago's chief magistrate.

"Yes, I want to see Mr. Grundbaum."

The fat fellow surveyed the young woman with a critical air, and remarked:

"Say, you ain't one of the profesh, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

"In w'ot line now?"

"Serio-comic."

"Oho, ho, ho! Tickle me with a feather!" the bummer exclaimed, with a chuckle. "I never would have guessed it from your looks."

"Looks are deceptive, you know," the young woman replied, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, of course; but then, as a rule, there is something about the profesh which enables a man w'ot is posted for to be able to pick 'em out on sight. Almost everybody w'ot is up to snuff could tell that I was an actor!" and the professional folded his arms across his chest, threw back his head, and endeavored to look dignified, but his attitude

was so comic that it was as much as the girl could do to keep from laughing in his face.

"Well, you certainly have a professional look," she remarked, as soberly as was possible under the circumstances.

"Yes, you can bet your ducats on that! Did you ever hear of Johnny Jimplecute, the Texas comedian?"

"No, never!"

"What, never?"

"Well, hardly—"

"Stop it!" cried the man, abruptly. "Don't ring in any played-out Pinafore gags on me or I shall have to yell for assistance."

"But, come now, jesting aside, fair and gentle lady, didn't you ever catch on to the Texas comedian, Johnny Jimplecute before?"

"No; never heard of him."

"Then you must be a stranger in these parts?"

"Yes, I am a stranger here."

"From the East?"

"From New York."

"Ever worked in the West?"

"Never."

"Ah, that accounts for it. I have never been in the East, and I don't s'pose the benighted heathen thar do know anything 'bout me; but in the West and in the South, you won't find many people who ain't posted on yours to command," and the man made an elaborate bow.

"Why, there was a time when I was one of the biggest local favorites that ever traveled through Texas; but you see, noble lady, I was one of them unfortunates who couldn't stand success, and I am only a wreck of what I once was, all because I couldn't say, no."

"When a friend asked me out to have a bowl I went, and the one bowl meant a dozen and then it was 'good by, John! And now, I have got to that point whar I can't stop—I can't let licker alone to save me!"

"If it wasn't for that I might be starring the country along with Joe Jefferson, Nat Goodwin, and the rest of the comedians who are making big money."

"Well, why don't you brace up and have some style about you?" the girl inquired in a matter-of-fact way.

"I can't—it is no use; I am a goner, and can never hope to git back to my lost position," the bummer's expression of lost hope was so comical that the girl could not longer restrain her mirth and so laughed outright.

"Yes, yes, I understand," she protested; "but you see—"

"Haw, haw, all you like, I don't mind it," Mr. Jimplecute interrupted, "but I want you to understand that it costs money to laugh at me, and pretty soon I shall strike you for a dollar!"

"Strike me for a dollar, Mr. Jimplecute? I don't know whether I can stand the pressure or not," the young woman responded, smilingly. "You see the fact is, I have had a run of bad luck lately, myself, and so am mighty short of money just now."

"It is the old story, you know. I left the boards to get married to a man of wealth, but after awhile it turned out that my hubby's wealth was all in his mind, and he expected me to work for the both of us."

"Ah, yes, 'tis often thus with love's young dream!" the comedian declared. "I have been there myself, you bet your boots!"

"You are a genius!" the girl cried, impulsively. "And, hang me! if I don't go a dollar on you, although I have only got a few left and don't know whether I will get a chance to work in this joint or not, for I propose to strike right here for an engagement."

And as the girl spoke she drew out a little pocket-book, very much the worse for wear, and selecting a one-dollar bill from a little roll, tendered it to the comedian.

"Ah, noble lady, I hate to take this lucre, for maybe you will not be able to catch on in this hyer crib," the comedian warned.

"Well, I will get a chance somewheres, and, maybe helping you will bring me good luck."

"That's so, and I shouldn't be surprised if it did work that way. I'll say ta, ta, for the present, now, for I want to go and astonish my stomach with a little solid food."

"I have been living on wind-pudding for the last two or three days, and I am afraid that it is a little too rich for my blood, so the

quicker I get back to the plebeian but nourishing hash the better.

"Ta, ta! I'll be on hand to-night, and if you catch the job I will do my best to impress the audience with the belief that you are a very great creature; ta, ta!"

The girl laughed as the man strutted away in turkey-cock fashion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE.

As the comedian marched off in one direction a fat German, about as broad as he was long, waddled up in the other, heading directly for the saloon.

"I shouldn't be surprised if this was my man," the Serio-Comic observed.

As the Teuton came up she accosted him.

"Is this Mr. Grundbaum?"

"Dot vas my name."

"I am a serio-comic singer, and I want to catch on somewhere. My name is Rosamond Raymond; I do a good act, and I am not afraid of work. I will do a dozen 'turns' a night if you want me to—can sing anything from the grand opera to 'Throw him down, McClosky,' and in the wine-room I can hold my own with any lady in the business! I don't want much coin, for I can afford to work cheap, if I can get a chance in a good joint like yours."

"Mine gootness!" exclaimed the old German, in amazement. "If you can sing as well as you can talk, you must be a lulu!"

"Just give me a chance to show you what I can do to-night, and if my act don't catch 'em great you needn't keep me on."

"Dot vos fair," the music-hall proprietor assented, and if your act does not go well you will not ask for monish?"

"Nary red! No hit, no pay! That is my motto!"

"S'pose you get along all right how mooch you wants a week?"

"Oh, I will work cheap—eight dollars, say, and do you give any commission in the wine-room on the drinks which I get the jays to buy for me?" the girl asked in a brisk, business-like way.

"Oh, yesh; all der performers gets der commission."

"That is all right then! I can pick up a dollar or two a night if the jays who float in to the wine-room have got any sporting-blood in them. I always work the gin and milk, and the brandy and water racket."

"V'ot vas dot?" the old German asked.

"Why, if I catch onto a jay, and get him to treat me, I tell the Reuben that my health isn't very good and the doctor told me I better drink gin and milk; then your beer-jerker brings along a tumbler with a little milk in it, and a little water in another glass. The water is supposed to be the gin, you know; actual cost to you is about a cent; you soak the jay for a quarter. I get ten cents for my rake, and you collar fourteen."

"Vell, vell; dot vas a goot scheme!"

"The brandy racket is just as good, too! That is about a cert's worth of sarsaparilla in a glass. It looks just like brandy, you know, and you hit the jay for a quarter, every time, and if the man is very green you can soak him for a half-a-dollar."

"You see, boss, I can go on drinking gin and milk, and brandy and water all night long and still be able to do my act, but if I was to take the real hard stuff six or eight drinks would be apt to make a monkey of me."

"Dot vas so," the manager agreed.

"Vell, yer comes here to-night about seven o'clock, and I vill have der leader of der orchestra meet you on der stage, and you can rehearse your moosic."

"All right, I will be on hand."

The girl departed, but promptly at seven o'clock that evening she made her appearance again.

Grundbaum was waiting for her in front of the music-hall, for he had been very favorably impressed by the girl.

He conducted her to the stage-door of the theater, where he introduced her to his stage manager and the leader of the orchestra.

The stage-manager was an old English actor, Joseph Johnson by name—a short, thick-set man of sixty or thereabouts, whose florid face betrayed that he was addicted to the use of strong liquors.

"The four proceeded to the stage, where the musician got his violin."

"What are you going to sing?" Johnson asked.

"Well, I think I will give them something in the sentimental line, as I see by the bills that you have two ladies who, I suppose, are giving the usual fancy-dress serio-comic act."

"Yes, both of them are in that line."

"I have a new version of 'After the Ball,' same air but entirely different words; then I have always had a deal of success with 'Within a Mile of Edinboro' Town,' although it is as old as the hills; then 'The Last Rose of Summer,' and 'Home, Sweet Home,' if they can stand me four times."

"Well, now, I shouldn't be surprised if you would catch on with that sort of thing, for we have not had anything of the kind since the house opened," the stage-manager admitted.

The songs were rehearsed, and it was plainly apparent to the three men, all of whom understood music, that the girl not only had a good voice, but was an excellent musician.

The experienced eyes of the stage-manager and the leader, too, detected that she could not only sing but could act as well.

"She will get through all right," Johnson said to the other two, after the rehearsal was over and the girl had gone to her dressing-room.

It was a Saturday night, and for the first time since the theater opened there was a good house.

The girl made her appearance a little after nine, and was warmly welcomed.

This was due to the fact that the Texas comedian, with a dozen carelessly-dressed men, who looked like far-Westerners, occupied front seats and started the applause.

The audience was in a mood to be pleased, and the girl made a hit.

All four songs were given; the auditors demanded a fifth, but the stage-manager had to appear and explain that her repertoire was exhausted.

Then the Westerners, who were Californians, egged on by the comedian, began to throw coins on the stage, after the good old Californian custom.

A number of others followed suit, and for a few moments there was wild excitement over the shower of coin.

The new Serio-Comic had made a most decided hit.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE DRESSING-ROOM.

THE silver shower came to an end though, for it is not customary nowadays to indulge in extravagance of this sort; the stage-manager hastened to gather up the coins, which, with an elaborate bow he presented to Miss Rosamond.

She saluted the audience, and, with a smiling, grateful look, bowed her way from the stage.

The girl proceeded to the dressing-room, followed by the other two ladies.

The theater had only two dressing-rooms, one on each side of the stage, so all the ladies dressed in one room, and the gentlemen in the other.

Miss Raymond had finished her preparation for her act and left the dressing-room before the other ladies arrived, so she had not held speech with them nor been introduced.

But performers in this line do not stand upon much ceremony with each other, and so the two began a conversation with the new-comer as soon as they reached the dressing-room.

"Well, well, you may congratulate yourself upon making the first hit that has ever been made in this unfortunate place!" one of the ladies declared, a slender, delicate-looking girl, a blonde, with blue eyes and light, fluffy hair.

"No one here has had manners enough to introduce you to us, so I will do it," she continued.

"Your name is Rosamond Raymond?"

"Yes."

"Mine is Florence Valentine, serio-comic; but I am taking up skirt-dancing now, and this is Miss Imogene Sutherland."

The second girl was a direct contrast to

the first, for she had heavy features, was stockily built, with black hair and eyes.

Her hair was short, too, and curled in little tiny ringlets all over her head.

From her appearance it seemed probable that she was of foreign extraction, and possibly of Jewish descent, for there was something about her countenance which suggested that she came of Israel's ancient race.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, ladies," Rosamond observed. "And equally glad to hear that you think I have made a hit."

She took a chair as she spoke and the others followed her example.

"Oh, there is no doubt about it!" Florence declared. "Why, I have been in the business for five years and this is the first time that I ever saw money thrown on the stage to a performer."

"It used to be a common thing in California, I believe, in the old mining days when the Californians had plenty of coin, so I have heard old performers say," Rosamond remarked.

"Well, it is a very pleasant custom, and I wish they would keep it up," the dark-eyed Imogene declared, in a peculiar, contralto voice.

"Why, you must have got five or six dollars," she added.

"Oh, more than that!" Florence exclaimed.

"I am sure I saw five or six silver dollars come on the stage, and ten or twelve halves, besides the small change."

"It would be just like old Johnson though, to pocket five or six dollars if he could get the chance," Imogene remarked, an ugly, disagreeable ring in her voice.

"I believe that man would sell his soul for money, so as to be able to buy all the liquor he wants."

"Oh, no, Imogene, I don't think he is quite as bad as all that," Florence protested.

By this time Rosamond had counted the money.

"I have just twelve dollars and a half! There is a windfall for you, girls!" she exclaimed, gleefully.

"Yes, I only wish it had come my way!" Florence declared.

"Well, I don't believe that you need the coin half as badly as I do," Rosamond replied.

"Then not only that, but the fact of my being able to make the audience shell out will be pretty certain to induce the old Dutchman to give me an engagement."

"You see, girls, I was just on trial to-night; no hit, no pay, and no engagement, but I think I am all solid now."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly!" Florence exclaimed. "And you ought to be able to get good, big money out of the old man too."

"Oh, no, no, there isn't any chance of that," Rosamond replied, with a shake of the head.

"You see, girls, I was awfully hard up when I applied to Grundbaum, and so I offered to come and work for eight dollars a week."

"Oh!" exclaimed both of the others in a breath.

"What ever did you want to do that for?" Florence asked.

"Why, you ought to have charged him fifteen at the least," she continued.

"He can't get a woman who is able to go on and do any kind of an act for less money."

"Didn't I tell you that I was awfully hard up?" Rosamond answered.

"And then, girls, I have been off the stage for some time, and I was a little doubtful about being able to make much of a hit."

"Then, too, I calculated that if I could get eight dollars a week salary I would be able to pick up at least a couple of dollars a night in the wine room."

"I hate the money that I get in that way!" Florence declared, impetuously.

"And if I could have my own way I would never go into the miserable place, but in all dives of this kind you must agree to go into the wine-room or else you will not get any work."

"Oh, I don't mind it," Rosamond replied, carelessly.

"Sometimes when a drunken man is inclined to bother you it is disagreeable, but if

the bouncer of the establishment knows his business, and is good for anything, he will see that the ladies are not annoyed.

"Then I am one of the kind, too, who can take care of themselves, and if anybody tries to get too fresh with me, I call them down so quickly that it makes their heads swim, and I can tell you that no dude makes the mistake of picking me up for a greenhorn the second time."

"Yes, I see, you are like Imogene here; she doesn't mind it, but I do," Florence remarked.

"I have to put up with it, though, and as soon as my turn is over—it comes next—I will have to go into the nasty place!"

Imogene laughed, a peculiar metallic laugh with very little tone of mirth in it.

"Florence is very foolish about this matter. I am like you, Raymond; I am able to take care of myself, and I don't mind talking with the gentlemen a bit. They must behave themselves though, and mustn't forget that I am a lady, for I do not stand any nonsense."

"There is my music!" Florence exclaimed, and off she scampered.

"She is a nice little thing, although she is stupid to make a fuss about the wine-room," Rosamond observed.

"It is a part of the business, and in this world we cannot always pick and choose, but are obliged to take things as they come."

"Of course, when I encounter a lout who is inclined to be rude, and thinks because a woman is on the stage he is not obliged to treat her with due respect, then I get angry, and am apt to express my sentiments pretty plainly, and I can tell you that the man who once gets a piece of my mind is not apt to want to go through the experience a second time."

"Yes, that is the way I manage matters. By the way, I believe you only do one turn to-night?"

"Only one, for I told Mr. Johnson that he had better see how the audience took my act before he risked two or more turns, for one appearance might be all the audience would feel inclined to put up with, and I wasn't anxious for them to throw things at me."

"It must be awkward, you know, to dodge beer glasses," Rosamond said in conclusion with a laugh.

"I don't believe that you were particularly afraid that you couldn't catch on," the other observed.

"Well, I didn't think I would make a failure, of course, for I was always able to hold my own with good performers, but I have had such a terrible bad run of luck for the last year or two that I did not know but what I might make a failure in this little dive."

"You haven't been on the stage lately, then?"

"No, it is the old story: I gave it up for the sake of a man—made a fool of myself, you understand, as a woman on the stage usually does when she marries an outsider."

"But that is neither here nor there, and I will not inflict a story on you. The fellow turned out to be a rascal—a regular crook, in fact, but that wouldn't have been so bad if he had been smart; he wasn't, though, for the officers got him dead to rights, and I was fool enough to allow him to persuade me to spend my good money in an attempt to get him off!"

"Well, it is natural for a woman to stick to a man, if she cares anything for him, when he gets in trouble."

"Yes, but I didn't really care anything about this fellow, if you come right down to the truth of it!" Rosamond admitted. "I married him because I thought he had a lot of money, and so I wouldn't have to work any more, and it wasn't until I had spent about all I had that I discovered he was one of the most notorious crooks in the country."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WINE-ROOM.

THE entrance of Florence interrupted the conversation.

"There, that is my last turn!" the girl exclaimed; "and if it wasn't for the miserable wine-room I could go home, but as it is I have got to stay until the end of the performance—to half-past eleven, about."

"Is that the rule?" Rosamond asked.

"Yes; after you get through on the stage, all the performers must go in the wine-room and do their best to get the gentlemen to buy drinks, and so make trade for the house!" Florence explained, her lip curling in contempt.

"Ugh! don't I hate it!" she continued.

"But what is a girl to do? I haven't got a name so as to get into the first-class variety houses where they don't have any wine-room, and am obliged to work in these places."

"Well, the only thing to do is to try and make the best of it," Rosamond counseled.

"What can't be cured must be endured, you know."

"Yes, but it is awful aggravating."

"By the way, girls, I have got to get a place to stop. I went to a little hotel, away down-town, and just took a room for the night, but it is too far away," Rosamond said, abruptly.

"You can get a pretty fair room, although it is small, at the house where I am staying for three dollars a week," Florence observed.

"And it is only a block away."

"That will do nicely. Can I get it to-night do you suppose?"

"Yes, the folks never go to bed until twelve or thereabouts."

"It is a regular professional house, you know."

"That is just the place for me then."

"Come, girls, we had better be going, or old Grundbaum will be after us to know why we are not attending to business," Imogene warned.

The three proceeded to the apartment known as the wine-room.

This was situated back of the saloon and was of medium size, being about twenty by twenty.

A number of tables and chairs were in the apartment, and a white-coated waiter attended to the wants of the guests.

There was an extra charge of fifty cents for admission to the wine-room, the inducement being that those of the audience who so felt inclined could make the acquaintance of the performers.

There were fifteen or sixteen gentlemen in the room, conversing with the artists, sitting in little groups at the tables.

Imogene and Florence were at once accosted by some newspaper men, who had dropped in to see what was going on.

Both the girls were glad to see the scribes, for they were jolly good fellows, and they knew a pleasant time might be anticipated.

Rosamond was duly introduced, and Florence immediately inquired if some of them wasn't going to give the new-comer a good "notice" in the morning on account of the hit which she had made.

The critics explained that they had just come, and so had not witnessed the performance.

"Give her a notice, anyway, and take my word for it!" Florence exclaimed.

At this point a handsome, dashing-looking fellow, muscular and finely proportioned, dressed too with the utmost taste, although in dark colors, with a head like a Greek god, as the saying is, a blonde, with regular, finely-cut features, lit up by a pair of dark gray-blue eyes, who was seated at a table at the extreme end of the room conversing with one of the performers, the banjo-player, Charley Michaelmas by name, happened to catch sight of the new Serio-Comic.

A look of surprise appeared on his face, and he called his companion's attention to the girl.

"Who is that—not one of your performers?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; she is a new-comer, though—made her first appearance to-night, and caught the gang for all they were worth," the banjo-player replied, and perceiving that his companion seemed interested, he gave a description of the girl's debut.

"What is her name?" the young man asked in a careless way, and yet a close observer would have surmised that he was very much interested in the matter.

"Rosamond Raymond."

"New in the business, I presume? I never heard the name before."

"Oh, that don't go for anything, you know," the other rejoined. "I have been tum-tumming on the ole banjo for over thirty years, and yet there's a heap of 'em,

good performers too, that I never heard of. In fact, the woods is full of variety people; but this 'ere gal ain't no amatoor, but a regular professional."

"I had a talk with her in the wing to-night before she went on, and I could see with half an eye that she understood her biz from A to izzard!"

"I would like to know her. Suppose you go and bring her over? I would go over there, but there would be no chance in such a crowd," he explained.

"Cert! glad to be able to oblige you," the banjo-player replied, rising.

"But you will have to excuse me for it is pretty near time for my next turn."

"All right!"

Then the banjo-player proceeded to where Rosamond sat, and asked the newspaper men if they would excuse the Serio-Comic for a few minutes as he wanted to introduce her to a friend of his.

"Certainly, of course," replied the gentlemen.

Then he conducted Rosamond to where the handsome fellow sat at the table in the corner.

"I think you will be glad to know this party," the banjo-player said to the girl as they proceeded across the room.

"He is one of the profession—an actor, and away up at the top of the heap; he is a star and runs a company of his own: a swell affair which plays to good money in all the big opera-houses."

"There is no knowing but some day he might take it into his head to give you a job, if he should happen to get hold of a play with a part in your line; but if he didn't happen to know you, you know, you wouldn't stand no show, 'cos this is a game where kissing goes by favor, according to the old rule."

"Yes, I am aware of that. Any one who isn't known doesn't stand a ghost of a show to get an opening," the girl replied.

The gentleman was sitting with his back to them, and didn't turn around until the pair came up, so the girl did not see his face until his name was spoken.

"Mr. Montgomery, I want you to shake hands with a friend of mine, Miss Rosamond, our new Serio-Comic, who made the biggest kind of a hit here to-night," the banjo-player said.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Rosamond," the gentleman remarked, shaking hands with the girl with as much politeness as though she had been a duchess.

"Now, I must toddle off and plunk-plunk the old banjo for a while; solong! I will see you again!" and the banjo player took his departure.

The waiter was on the alert, and he approached as soon as the couple seated themselves, for he anticipated from the appearance of the gentleman that he would give a good order, and in all places of this kind it is the game for the waiter to come up with an inquiring look, as if he felt sure that an order was about to be given.

In this way a man who is not particularly cheeky is often forced into giving an order, when he would have avoided it if he could without appearing to be mean.

"Will you have something to drink?" the gentleman asked.

"Thank you, I don't mind," Rosamond assented.

"A small bottle," the gentleman ordered, "and tell your barkeeper it is for Robert Montgomery, the actor. I want the best there is in the house; no sparkling cider business such as you ring in on the jays."

The waiter grinned.

"That is all right, Mister Montgomery; we have got good wine, and we don't play no games on a gentleman like you is," he remarked, and departed.

Montgomery fixed his gaze intently on the face of the Serio-Comic, a serious expression on his countenance, while she looked at him in a peculiar way, a half-smile on her lips.

And as soon as the waiter was out of hearing, the young actor exclaimed:

"For Heaven's sake, Mignon Lawrence, will you explain the meaning of this?"

"My name is Rosamond Raymond, and I am a serio-comic vocalist, you must understand," she returned, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that. Charley Michaelmas explained to me that

you were a new-comer here, and had succeeded in making a hit this evening."

"Yes; I am solid here now, eight dollars a week, and what I can pick up in the wine-room here by inducing silly young men to buy wine," and the Serio-Comic laughed in the face of the gentleman.

"You are the first victim, you understand," she continued. "This small bottle which you have ordered is worth about three dollars at regular prices, but you will have to pony up five for it, and that means a dollar commission to me, then if I talk sweet to you perhaps I can get you to order another one, and that would bring me another dollar; two dollars a night, seven nights in the week, is fourteen, and with the eight it comes to twenty-two dollars a week, which is not such a bad salary," she explained, still smiling, and with a look on her face which completely puzzled the young man.

"Why, Mignon, what has happened to you?" he exclaimed in wonder.

"I should think that to such a woman as I know you to be a life like this would be one of perpetual torment!"

The appearance of the waiter with the wine at this moment interrupted the conversation.

The man dexterously opened the bottle and filled the glasses with the bubbling fluid.

"Five dollars, please," the man said.

The young actor took a five-dollar bill from his pocket-book together with a quarter.

"There's the five for the wine and a trifle for yourself."

"Much obliged," said the waiter with a grin, and highly delighted, for since he had taken service in the Glorious Alcazar, "tips" had been few and far between.

So he departed with the idea that the actor was a swell of the first water.

"You are liberal," Rosamond observed.

"Well, I can afford to be to such a man as he is," Montgomery replied. "Then, too, as it happens, I am very flush now. Just come to the end of my season with a large profit."

"I am a star now, with my own company, and if there is any money made I make it."

"Yes, I read in the newspapers about how successful you had been since you started with your new play."

"Well, here's good fortunes to us both," and the young actor raised his glass.

"That is a very good toast," and the girl pledged her companion with the wine.

"And, Mignon, will you have the kindness to explain what you are doing in a dive of this kind? You were always a prudent and sensible girl—not one of the kind to throw money away, but you surely must have encountered some great reverse of fortune to make you willing to earn a living in this manner."

"You know that I claim my name is Rosamond Raymond."

"Yes, but I know very well you are Mignon Lawrence, who traveled in the same company with me for eight months, and with whom I passed many a pleasant hour; and, do you know, Mignon, when I reflect upon those old days, when we had such good times together, it gives me great pleasure."

"You were such a sensible, jolly sort of a girl, a man could take you around without your immediately coming to the conclusion that he was over head and ears in love with you; and do you remember how we used to laugh at the talk of some of the company in regard to our being devoted lovers, when in reality there was not the least bit of truth in the supposition."

"We were good friends, but that was all."

"I will admit that it was possible, though, that the feeling which I had for you might have ripened into love, if you had been at all inclined to lead me on, but you were not, for you told me frankly, right at the beginning, that you were much more like a man than a woman—that you had never been in love in all your life, and it was your opinion that if you ever did feel the influence of the tender passion, the object would much more likely be a woman than a man."

"You are making this Mignon Lawrence out to be a very strange creature," the girl remarked, with a quiet smile.

"And so you are; there isn't any mistake about that; but I never met any one yet whom I liked better, with a single exception

of a certain lady whom I hope one day to marry."

"But the feeling which I have for you is different to that I entertain for her; you are my friend and she is my sweetheart."

"Oh, yes, I understand," the girl remarked.

"The right kind of a man or woman can always find room in the heart for both friendship and love at the same time."

"That is the truth, and although I have met a girl whom I love devotedly, yet I still feel as great a friendship for you as I ever did, and that is the reason which prompted me to get an opportunity to talk to you, for I recognized your face as soon as you came into the room, for you have not changed materially since I last saw you, although it is over five years ago."

"Five years is a long time," the woman observed slowly.

"Yes, I know it is, and yet, as we sit here chatting together it seems as if it was only a month or so ago since we parted."

"And now, Mignon, I am going to take advantage of our old-time friendship to tell you frankly that it is my intention to have you out of this dive as soon as possible."

"I suppose that you are short of money," the young actor continued.

"Reverses will come to all of us in this world, no matter how prudent we are; but I can tell you that you will never need to want for a dollar as long as I have one."

"Friendship with you, then, is something more than a mere name," Rosamond remarked with a smile.

"Well, as far as you are concerned, it certainly is," Montgomery declared.

"Even if I only had a little money, I would be glad to share it with you, but as I have made a small fortune, I can afford to let you have money enough to support you in good style until the fall season opens."

"Thank you, Bob; you are a noble fellow!" the girl cried impulsively.

"But I can't accept your offer, and I can't tell you why just at present, and you must bear in mind that no matter how much I may resemble this Mignon Lawrence of whom you speak, I am named Rosamond Raymond, and you must be careful never to call me anything else."

The actor was surprised, and his face plainly showed it.

"This is something of a mystery," Montgomery observed, slowly.

"Yes, it is, and this is no place for an explanation, you know," the Serio-Comic remarked, with a rapid glance around to see if any one was paying particular attention to them.

"But I must have a chance to talk to you. I need advice, and I remember what a clear head you always had."

"Well, I will meet you to-morrow at the Post-office, say at one clock; then we can go to some quiet restaurant, where we can have a good dinner, just as we used to, and can talk to our hearts' content."

"That will do," Montgomery assented.

"You see Mig—I mean Rosamond, I have fallen in love with a wealthy girl, and I need the advice of a clear-headed woman like yourself."

"You shall have it!"

Then they finished their wine and the actor took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GAMBLER.

THE Texan comedian had a glorious time with the Californian whose acquaintance he had contrived to make.

All of the Pacific Slopers had been drinking pretty freely, and happening to encounter the bummer in the neighborhood of the music hall, they commenced to guy him, attracted by his odd appearance.

But, this was a game at which "Jack was quite as good as his master," and the odd replies of the comedian amused the strangers so much that they invited the Texan to go with them.

Being a party of rough fellows themselves, although possessed of plenty of money, the disreputable appearance of the comedian did not trouble them at all.

Then an idea occurred to Jimplecute.

He would get the party to go to the music

hall, and when the Serio-Comic, who had been generous enough to go a dollar on him, made her appearance he would start the applause.

The comedian was going on the principle that one good turn deserves another.

He had no difficulty in getting his new-made acquaintances to patronize the Glorious Alcazar, and they thought it a fine lark to join in with the comedian and applaud the Serio-Comic.

Then, acting on the spur of the moment, the Texan threw a quarter on the stage, an example which the Californians were prompt to follow, for they were just in the humor for fun of this kind.

After the music-hall performance ended, the Californians and the comedian took a parting drink together, and then the Pacific Slopers chipped in and presented the bummer with ten dollars as a testimonial of their appreciation of his genius.

"You are the champion liar, and we are going to go ten dollars on you!" the spokesman of the party said, as he presented the bills to the bummer.

The comedian grinned in delight, and the Californians departed.

"This hyer will pass for a lucky day!" Jimplecute exclaimed, in high joy, as he sauntered up the street.

Then a young, well-dressed man came out of a saloon and went up-stairs to the lodging-house which was overhead.

"If that isn't Richmond from New Orleans!" the comedian cried. "He was allers good for a stake! Hadn't I better strike him? He is a gambler and all that, but his money is jest as good as any man's!"

Acting on the impulse, the comedian followed the man up the stairs.

At the head of the steps was a long entry, and the gambler, as the Texan had termed him, was just going into the last door on the right-hand side as Jimplecute reached the landing.

The Texan followed him promptly, knocked at the door, and when the occupant—now in his shirt-sleeves—threw open the door, the comedian marched into the apartment.

"Jimmy, old boy, how are you?—how are all the gay sports in Orleans?" the fat Texan cried, as he warmly shook the other's hand.

"Well, well, this is a surprise-party!" the gambler exclaimed. "Why, Johnny, you are about the last man that I expected to meet in Chicago."

"Well, I came to take in the Fair, me noble lord! But I am afraid there is a mistake in the calculation, for the Fair has taken me in."

"Lost all your chips?"

"Yes; you see, I got in with a hard gang, but after they cleaned me out, they showed that they were white men by giving me a chance to make a stake now and then."

"Take a chair and make yourself comfortable," the gambler insisted as he closed the door.

"A hard gang, eh?" he continued, seating himself on the side of the bed.

"You bet!"

"Is there a man in the party who has the stuff in him to give a woman a ticket to the other world if he was well paid for it?" the gambler asked with a dark look on his handsome face.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPORT EXPLAINS.

THE comedian was considerably astonished by the abruptly put question.

"A ticket to the other world?" he echoed.

"Yes; you understand what that means, don't you?"

"Well, I suppose I do," the Texan assented, not knowing what else to say.

"There is a woman in existence who has no right to be in the world, and so the quicker she is out of it the better."

"Ah, yes, I see."

And the comedian nodded his head, but there was a blank look on his face.

"There will be good money in the job, you understand."

"Good money, eh?"

"Yes; and the work will not be difficult," the gambler explained.

"Not difficult?" repeated the Texan.

"That is right! A good man can do the trick without any trouble."

"Well, I would like to oblige you in this thing, of course, for you are an old-time pard of mine, and have allers treated me like a white man; and you can bet your sweet life, too, that I am ever anxious for a chance to catch on to good money, but you see, Jimmy, this is a leetle out of my line," was the rejoinder.

"Oh, you misunderstand me!" the gambler exclaimed; "I hadn't any idea you would do the job!"

The face of the Texan brightened.

"Ah, you didn't expect me to make the rifle?"

"No, of course not. Why, hang it, man, I reckon I am too good a judge of human nature to make any mistake of that kind."

"Well, really now, me noble lord, I will give you my word that I was clean flabbergasted—knocked into a cocked hat, so to speak," the comedian declared.

"It is very true that 'man in his time plays many parts,' and I have had a hand in many a deed of blood—on the stage—and some sapient critics, 'men wise in their own conceit,' have at various times gone to the extreme of saying that I murdered about every character that I was ever cast for; yet, by all the gods on high Olympus, I will swear that the statement is as far from the truth as I from Hercules!"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't make the blunder of thinking that you could do anything of the kind, for you hav'n't got the sand!" the gambler declared.

"That is right. I admit the soft impeachment!" the Texan replied.

"When it comes to 'touching' a man for a dollar, you are the king-pin, but for a job of this kind you are no good."

"Jimmy, there is no denying that there is a heap of sense in what you say."

"No, my idea was that you might run across some man who would be glad to get a good bit of money for a job of this sort."

"Yes, me royal dook, I see!"

"I am a stranger here in Chicago, and so I don't know where to look for a fellow who would be glad to pick up a hundred dollars for such an easy piece of work."

"Oh, but, Jimmy, old pard, *will* the job be an easy one?" the Texan inquired, in a tone which showed that he had considerable doubt in regard to the matter.

"Well, it will not be as easy as rolling off a log, but a man cannot in reason expect to pick up a hundred ducats without going to some trouble," the gambler replied.

"That is true."

"You understand: the only interest I have in the matter is to oblige a friend of mine," Richmond explained. "He is one of the bloods, and has led a pretty fast life. For some reason he has got it in for this woman, and he wants her out of the way."

"He was a mighty good friend to me at a time when I needed a friend awful bad, and so, when he happened to say to me, 'Jimmy, I would be glad to give a good many 'cases' to get this she-devil out of the way,' I jumped at the chance to oblige him."

"Of course, that was natural! You tickle me, I tickle you, and there you are!" the comedian intimated.

"That is the idea. I did not try to make any bargain with him about the matter, but I said I did not believe it would be possible to get a man to do the job for less than a hundred dollars."

"A man ought to get as much as that for a job of this kind, for if anything should go wrong, and the operator get the collar, it would be a hanging matter, me lord!" the Texan declared.

"He agreed with me that a hundred was little enough, and said he was willing to give it, but I don't doubt, you know, Johnny, that if I succeed in pulling off the affair all right he will make me a present of a hundred more."

"Very likely!" the comedian assented.

"He certainly ought to," he continued. "For, by your taking charge of the thing, you assume all the risk in case anything goes wrong."

"Yes, if the man made a bungle of the job and got the stone jug, if the pressure became so great as to induce him to squeal, I would be the only one he could 'blow the gaff' on."

"I don't want to get you into it, you understand," Richmond continued.

"All I care for you to do is to find some good man, who you think could do the job up in good shape, and introduce him to me, of course keeping my name quiet, you know; you can call me anything—say Tom Jackson, that will do—and I will fix the business up with him."

"It will be worth a ten-dollar note to you if you can do it."

"Well, I wouldn't mind picking up the money if I should happen to run across the right man."

"I know what sort of a fellow you are, and that is the reason I speak to you about the matter."

"Down in Orleans you were always hanging 'round the dives where the crooks congregate, and I suppose you play the same game here in Chicago."

"Ah, touch me not so nearly!" the comedian exclaimed in his absurd way.

"I will acknowledge that I am tolerable fond of licker, and as I am rather careless about my apparel—a great many geniuses are that way, you know—the proud and well fed barkeeper of the high-toned saloon looks askance at me if I dare to enter; he makes no bones in telling me, in no uncertain tones, that my room is a deal better than my company, therefore I am driven to frequent the shebangs where they don't care how a man is dressed, provided he has the wherewithal to pay for his bug-juice."

"Now, you just keep your eyes open, and the odds are big that you can find a man who will be glad to do the job, and you will be able to pick up ten cases without having to go to any trouble."

"I will make a try for it, me noble dook!" the comedian announced.

"You needn't come right out with the full particulars of the game," the gambler observed.

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"You can sound the man, and find out whether he is willing to pick up a hundred by tackling a job of this kind."

"Of course."

"Some man who has the reputation of being willing to take desperate chances is the fellow you want, you know."

"Certainly!"

"Although, really, if the man is good at getting up a scheme, he ought to be able to fix a game like this so that there will not be much of any risk."

"How is that?"

"The woman does not amount to anything—a girl who sings in one of these low variety dives."

"Oh, yes, I see!" becoming interested.

"Of course, girls of that kind come and go without anybody paying any particular attention to their movements."

"That is so."

"If one of them should suddenly be killed, the chances are big that no one would feel interested enough in the matter to cause an inquiry to be made," the gambler argued.

"Yes, I think you are right about that."

"There are plenty of chances for a man who is at all smart to get an opportunity to strike a blow at a woman of that kind."

"You bet!"

"She leaves the dive late at night, eleven or twelve o'clock, and while she is on her way home it would not be a difficult matter for a man who has got the sand to take chances, to be able, with either a knife or a pistol, to close her account with this world."

The old bummer shivered.

"My dear old pard, don't talk about the matter in such a cold-blooded way!" he urged. "You really give me the horrors, you know."

The gambler laughed.

"You are not made of the stoutest kind of stuff, are you?"

"Well, I am not so young as I once was," the Texan explained. "And my nerves are a trifle on edge."

"I don't wonder at it, considering the quantity of bad whisky that you have got away with in your time."

"No, no, you are wrong about that!" the comedian declared.

"There isn't any bad whisky: some whisky may be better than other whisky, but it is all good, and none bad!"

The gambler laughed at this explanation.

"You are a regular old soaker, and no mistake!" he declared.

"I will put on my coat, and we will go and have a couple of drinks for a night-cap."

The Texan expressed his satisfaction at this arrangement.

The pair descended to the saloon and had their liquor.

"You will only find me here at night, and not until after eleven," the gambler remarked, as they left the saloon.

"Don't lose any time in hunting up a man, and here is a fiver on account."

The comedian was profuse in his thanks, and the two parted.

The Texan chuckled merrily as he walked down the street.

"I think I may say, without being accused of exaggeration, that this has been a remarkably lucky day for me, for things have been coming my way in a manner calculated to excite my warmest admiration!"

The street was deserted so he could indulge in his peculiar habit of talking out loud to himself as he proceeded.

"I expected to strike the gay gambolier for a dollar, and, lo, and behold! I collar five cases, without even having to go to the trouble of asking for them!"

Then the Texan's mood changed; his face grew dark with thought, and he trudged on for a time in silence.

"This gal business is mighty queer," he muttered. "She sings in a variety dive? Can it be the Glorious Alcazar?—can it be that it is the woman who helped me to-day?"

"She is a stranger, and there is something odd about her—some mystery, and I should not be surprised if she was the girl who is to be done for."

"I will hunt her up to-morrow and have a talk. She is a deep one, I think, but, maybe, I can get some points!" the Texan declared with a self-satisfied air.

CHAPTER IX

EXCHANGING CONFIDENCES.

BOTH the young actor, Montgomery, and the serio-comic singer, who called herself Rosamond Raymond, were prompt to the minute in keeping their appointment.

Montgomery greeted the lady cordially and offered her his arm.

Then, as they proceeded down the street, he said:

"There is an extra good restaurant on Clark street, where they have some private rooms up-stairs for the accommodation of parties who are averse to dining in public."

"We will take one of the rooms, and while we enjoy our repast, we can talk to our hearts' content."

"That will do nicely," the Serio-Comic admitted.

The busy streets of lower Chicago in the middle of the day are always filled with a hurrying, bustling crowd, so that it is impossible for a conversation to be carried on with any degree of comfort, therefore but few words were exchanged between the two until they were in the private room of the restaurant.

"What would you like to eat?" the actor inquired.

"Select what you please," the girl replied. "I have perfect faith in your judgment."

The order was given, and the waiter retired.

"You have not changed much in the years which have elapsed since we met," Montgomery observed. "Certainly you do not look any older, and I think that in appearance you have improved, although to judge from the style of your dress the world is not treating you very well just now."

"Ah, but you cannot always judge by appearances, you know."

"That is true, and I confess I was greatly surprised when I recognized you last night. I have not heard much of anything about you during the last two or three years, and supposed you had retired from the stage."

"Yes, I did retire. About a year after the time when we were together I was idiot enough to get married to a young Englishman whom I supposed to be wealthy, but who turned out to be a regular scamp."

"You were unfortunate!"

"It served me right, for I didn't really love the man, but I am such a queer creature that I don't believe I can ever love anybody as a woman ought to love the man she marries. At the time I was disgusted with the stage; I couldn't seem to get along, and so was eager to get away from it."

"You were desperate, eh?"

"Yes, that is about it. But, my husband was a scamp, and when my eyes were opened to that fact he ran away with my intimate friend, first robbing me of all my valuables."

"He was a scoundrel!"

"I was so disgusted that I came to the conclusion the quicker I got out of the world the better, and was on my way to put an end to myself when I met a gentleman in the private detective line whose acquaintance I had chanced to make."

"He is a born sleuth if ever there was one, for he speedily saw that something was the matter with me, so carried me off to a restaurant, got me to eat a good dinner, with a lot of wine to cheer me up, and I concluded that life was worth living after all."

Montgomery laughed.

"Life is a great deal what we ourselves make it, although of course circumstances hamper us somewhat," he observed.

"The detective wanted a woman like myself to do a certain piece of work; I accepted his offer, and have been with him, off and on, ever since."

"He is good enough to flatter me by saying I have rare abilities for a detective's life; but, be that as it may, I certainly have been successful, and at last I had the satisfaction of nabbing my recreant husband and putting him behind the bars."

"He escaped the hangman, though, by dying. I suppose I ought to be sorry for him; but, really, I am not good enough to be affected in that way."

The young actor smiled.

"You are as frank and honest as ever, I see," he remarked.

"Yes, that is one merit I certainly possess."

"Am I to understand that you are now in Chicago on detective business?" Montgomery asked.

"Yes, I do not hesitate to confide the truth to you, for I know I can depend upon your discretion."

"Certainly!"

"So please bear in mind that I am Rosamond Raymond, a Serio-Comic more or less talented, and that is all you know about me."

"I understand; and rest assured, I will use great care not to betray your secret. In the future, too, I shall be particular to address you as Miss Rosamond Raymond."

"If you will be so kind."

"That is not a bad name, by the way," the actor observed.

"Yes, I think it will look well on the bills," with a laugh.

The appearance of the waiter with the dinner interrupted the conversation at this point.

"Now we can talk as we eat," Montgomery remarked after the waiter had departed; "but first, I will give you a toast," and he filled the glasses with the fragrant Chablis which he had ordered.

"Here is success to your enterprise!"

"I will drink that gladly enough," the girl responded; "and now I will give you one," holding out her glass to be refilled.

"Success to your enterprises!" was her toast when the glasses were again filled to the brim with the bubbling wine.

"Thank you!"

And they drank.

"I trust the wish will be fulfilled," the actor remarked, as they proceeded to enjoy the dinner, "for I have one particular enterprise on hand which I hope will be a success."

"It is not connected with the stage, I judge, as there is hardly a doubt but you will achieve success on your coming tour."

"You are right; it is a private, and not a professional affair; and as it is rather a complex matter, I would be glad to have your advice on the subject."

"I shall be happy to give it, of course."

"You see I have a great deal of faith in your wisdom."

"You flatter me!" the Serio-Comic declared with a laugh.

"Oh, not at all! You were always a steady, sober sort of a girl; I know very well that you are possessed of great natural shrewdness, and, as there is a woman in the case, I do not doubt that you will be able to give me good advice."

"Well, I will do the best I can for you; be sure of that."

"Last season I played three weeks here in Chicago, as is the custom with a number of stars, appearing first at Havlin's Theater on the south side, then at the Haymarket on the west, and winding up at the Windsor Theater on the north side."

"Of course, like all men in my position, I usually receive a number of letters from unknown women: what are commonly termed 'mash letters.'"

"Yes, there are plenty of people in the world, both male and female, anxious to write themselves down as fools," the Serio-Comic observed.

"As a rule I never take any notice of them; I glance through the letters, out of pure curiosity, and then destroy them, but on the Monday morning after the Sunday opening at Havlin's Theater, I got a letter so different from the usual run of such epistles that I at once became interested in it."

"It was a regular critical note, and called my attention to certain defects in my otherwise extremely good performance, as the writer was pleased to say."

"I thought the matter over, and came to the conclusion that the statement was correct."

"From playing the part a long time I had become careless, but that night I was on my guard, and tried to correct my mistakes."

"On the next afternoon I received another letter, thanking me for paying attention to the advice of an unknown critic."

"The next day another letter arrived, saying that I was playing the part still better, and the writer had determined to be present at every performance, so as to note if it was possible for me to improve any more."

"That was certainly flattering."

"Yes. Now, as a rule, I seldom see anybody in the front of the house, but I had noticed a single lady who sat well back in one of the lower boxes."

"I presumed she was a relative of the manager of the house, as she had attended every performance, but now it suddenly occurred to me that it might be my unknown correspondent, who had simply signed 'Michigan Avenue' to her notes."

"Upon speaking to the treasurer on the subject, I found that my surmise was correct. The lady had come on Monday morning, and taken the box for every performance during the week."

"Well, as the box cost her about ten dollars a performance, she was giving a tolerably expensive proof that she took a decided interest in you."

"At the Haymarket Theater she did the same, and by this time I had come to take a decided interest in the unknown, for she was young, pretty, and from her appearance I judged that she was a lady both by birth and education."

"Each day I received a letter, all of them well-written, nothing silly about them."

"Then on the Sunday morning following the close of my Haymarket Theater engagement, I went out to the World's Fair to see how matters were progressing, and there, face to face, I encountered the unknown."

"She was alone, halted abruptly upon perceiving me, and blushed to her temples."

"Acting upon the impulse of the moment I spoke, saying that I wished to thank her for her kindly letters, and that it would give me a great deal of pleasure to make her acquaintance, so I trusted she would pardon me for addressing her in so informal a manner."

"I presume she wasn't particularly offended by your boldness," Rosamond suggested.

"No, although at first she was inclined to be a little reserved, but that soon wore away and we had a very enjoyable chat."

"Well, to make a long story short, during the rest of my sojourn in Chicago I saw her every day. I was in love with the girl, and when I told her so, she acknowledged that

she loved me, but said there were obstacles in the way."

"She was an heiress, and there was a large sum of money coming to her when she was twenty-one; she was only eighteen now."

"Her aunt, a maiden lady of fifty, and her brother, fifteen years older than herself, were the executors of the estate, and according to the provisions of her father's will, if she married without their consent before she came in possession of her property—before she was twenty-one—she would forfeit her inheritance."

"I suppose her father thought that by putting in a clause of this kind he could save her from becoming the prey of some fortune-hunter before she got old enough to know her own mind."

"She seems to be very much afraid that her aunt and brother would make a dreadful time if they knew of her love affair with me, and though asked why she should fear, for as long as she did not get married they could not trouble her, she did not seem willing to explain."

"I have never been to her house, although I know where she lives on Michigan avenue, and my letters are sent to her, under an assumed name, to the general post-office."

"She is called Leonora MacClenahan, and I direct the letters to Leonora Mack."

The Serio-Comic shook her head.

"I will say to you frankly that I don't like the looks of this affair," she declared.

"Well, I must say that I am dissatisfied, and yet she seems to be one of the sweetest girls in the world, and the only explanation I can give is that she, for some reason, stands in great fear of her relatives."

"Well, now, really, it is lucky that you took the notion into your head to confide in me, for this is right in my detective line," Rosamond remarked. "Trust to me to discover the truth!"

The actor was delighted by the offer.

CHAPTER X.

THE SKIRT-DANCER.

As Montgomery said, the words of the Serio-Comic took a weight from his mind.

Then the two chatted upon various subjects until they finished the dinner; then the actor escorted Rosamond to her car, and they separated.

The Serio-Comic had secured a furnished room at the house where Florence Valentine, the skirt-dancer, found accommodations.

This was not a new building, run up in the cheapest manner for the express purpose of providing accommodations for the visitors to the Fair, but an old-fashioned mansion, occupied by a retired professional, who had once been a circus clown, and when the variety hall opened in the neighborhood, he took it into his head—as he had plenty of room, his family only consisting of himself and wife—to furnish accommodations to the performers.

The house was nicely furnished, and the parlor a really cozy one, which the guests were welcome to occupy as much as they chose.

Rosamond had a room which adjoined the parlor, and she had to pass through that apartment to reach it.

Miss Valentine was in the parlor engaged in reading a letter, when the Serio-Comic entered.

The skirt-dancer was apparently amused by the letter, for there was a smile upon her face.

Florence Valentine was a pretty woman, although there were deep lines of care on her face, and a close observer would have said that this dark-complexioned girl, who looked like a foreigner, had had a deal of trouble in her life.

"Here is quite a joke, Raymond," the skirt-dancer said, as the other entered the apartment.

It is a peculiarity of the professional women that they have a habit of addressing each other by their last names rather than by the first.

"Yes? what is it?"

"An offer of marriage from Billy Dougan—he is the bones-player, you know."

"Yes, I am aware of it," Rosamond remarked as she passed on to her own room, where she proceeded to remove her hat.

She left the door open so she could carry on the conversation.

"I know Billy has been very attentive lately, but had no idea he meant anything by it."

"Well, he seems to be a nice fellow, and is not bad-looking," the actress observed.

"Ah, yes; but he knows I can't marry him, or rather, that I wouldn't marry, no matter how much I might think of a man, until I am sure my husband is dead, and I am certain that he is not, although I have not heard from him for three years."

"But he is alive! I am certain of it!" the skirt-dancer cried, becoming excited, thrusting the letter in her bosom, and rising to her feet as she spoke.

"He is alive, and he will not die until I kill him, which I will do at the very first opportunity!"

The door opened suddenly, and Billy Dougan made his appearance.

"Oh, Florence, I have seen your husband!" the bones-player cried.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WOMAN'S STORY.

THIS unexpected announcement caused the woman to start in surprise.

"You don't mean to say that you have seen my husband?" exclaimed the skirt-dancer, fairly trembling with agitation.

"Yes, indeed!" the bones-player averred.

It was a peculiarity of this gentleman that he very often used in private life the negro dialect which he assumed when he put on the burnt cork and made his appearance on the stage to do his act.

"Are you sure?" the skirt-dancer demanded, excitedly.

"Oh, yes, you bet your sweet life on it! I see'd the man with my own two looking eyes!"

"Where was he?"

"Down at the post-office. I came across him right by the stamp-window, and mebbe I wouldn't have caught on to him if he hadn't made a dive to git out of my way, for he saw me jest a moment before I saw him, but he wasn't quick enough, for I got a good view of his face and spotted him dead to rights, then he dodged into the crowd and disappeared."

"I thought he would come to Chicago and that is why I came here!" Florence exclaimed.

"I had a presentiment that sooner or later I would meet him."

"But I say, Florry, Chicago is a mighty big place, you know, and the odds are great ag'in' your being able to find him," Dougan opined.

"Yes, I know that; but I am satisfied that, sooner or later, we will come together!" the girl declared with the air of an inspired prophetess.

"Did you get my letter, by the way?" the bones-player asked, abruptly.

"Yes."

"Well, you understand that the offer I made don't go now, you know. I didn't reckon there was any chance that he would put in an appearance. It was my notion that he had cashed in his chips long ago, for men in his line are mighty apt to die sudden with his boots on."

"But as he is alive, the offer don't go! that is all O. K., eh?"

"Oh, yes, I understand; but you need not worry; there wasn't any chance of my accepting your offer," the skirt-dancer assured.

"You are a good fellow, Billy, and I like you well enough as a friend, but after the experience I have had with one husband you can rest assured that I will never trust my happiness into the keeping of another man as long as I live."

"Well, I don't know as I can blame you," the bones-player returned. "Of course I don't know much 'bout your family matters, but I do know that your husband was a bad egg and when you say that he treated you badly I am willing to take your word for it."

"You can do me a service, Billy, if you will!" the woman now added.

"Cert! I will if I kin—what is it?"

"If you should happen to see my husband

again will you try to keep your eyes on him so as to see where he goes?"

The bones-player shook his head in a doubtful way.

"Well, I would like to oblige you; yes, indeed, I would, but I am afraid if I should try it I would find out that I had bitten off more than I could chew."

"In the first place you kin bet your sweet life if he gits his eyes on me he will not have any follering business in his'n, for he is altogether too fly for anything of that kind."

"And, now that he has seen me, you know, he will have his eyes peeled, and it is on the dead square that he isn't going to let any man play the shadow act on him."

"But if I do happen to run across him I will do the best I kin for you of course!" and with this assurance Mr. Billy Dougan took his departure.

Florence sunk into a chair, her hands clinched, and an expression of great determination written upon her features.

Rosamond, coming from her apartment into the parlor, was surprised by the expression upon the face of the skirt-dancer.

"You are greatly excited!" she said

"Ah, yes, and I have reason to be. The very thought that I am in the same city with this man whom I hate so bitterly makes me all on fire."

"I fancy, then, that your matrimonial experience has not been a pleasant one," the Serio-Comic remarked as she took a seat in a comfortable easy-chair.

"You are right; it was not."

"I went through a little experience of that kind myself. I was fool enough to get married because I was tired of the stage and wanted a home of my own."

"My case exactly!" the skirt-dancer exclaimed.

"And my precious husband turned out to be the biggest kind of a fraud, and in a very little while I was back on the stage again working to support the pair of us."

"Just the experience that I went through," Florence added. "I was dancing in New Orleans when I made the acquaintance of a gentleman who called himself James Alexander, and said he was a rich planter from the sugar district of Louisiana."

"Oh, yes, these ducks are always all rich when they run after the theater girl! My particular humbug was the younger son of a noble English family, and due in time to come in for wealth galore!"

"I was weak enough to marry this Alexander, and, too late, discovered that he was only a common gambler depending upon his wits for a living. But, despite that fact, I loved the man and was quite content to support him, which I did without a murmur."

"Then came a sudden turn of fortune's wheel. I was lucky enough to win a prize of fifteen thousand dollars in a lottery."

"Well, well, that was a streak of luck!" the Serio-Comic declared.

"And, strange to say, I was wise enough not to give all the money to my husband, but as he had already begun to treat me with indifference, I was a little suspicious of him, for he had dropped hints at times when he had drank more liquor than was good for him, that I was not the first woman he had married to help him to get out of a tight place."

"Ah, yes, I understand; the miserable scoundrell!"

"But I made an even division with him, giving him a clear half of the money."

"Well, that was certainly treating him in the most liberal manner."

"The money did not last him a week, for, in haste to get rich, he gambled it all away."

"Ah, yes, that is what the majority of gamblers do, and it has always seemed to me to be so strange that the men who know how great the odds are against the player, will, when they succeed in winning a good stake from some greenhorn, go and risk it in trying to break some other man's faro bank."

"Just at this time I was unfortunate enough to fall sick with a fever, and instead of calling a doctor and taking care of me himself as a husband should, he bundled me off to the hospital."

"The unmitigated brute!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed.

"For a month I hovered between life and

death, and during that time my husband never once visited me."

"Hanging would be too good for such a man—he ought to be boiled alive in oil or put to death by some other dreadful torture!" Rosamond declared.

"Finally I was pronounced to be on the road to health again, and wondering at the absence of my husband I sent for him, but no answer was returned; then I wrote to the old gentleman from whom we rented our rooms. He came, and a dreadful story indeed it was he told me."

"My husband had contrived to fascinate a young lady possessed of a small fortune, and had induced the girl to elope with him, and before departing had disposed of all the things in our rooms."

"He was a double-distilled scoundrell!"

"And when I came out of the hospital I discovered that, before going away, he had, by means of forging my signature, succeeded in getting all of my money out of the bank."

"My man was bad enough, but he wasn't a marker to this wretch!"

"I was helpless, unable to work, but thanks to a few performers who got me up a benefit I was able to get along until I could go on the stage again."

"Then I met a man who had been my husband's pal and I learned that, after getting the girl's money, he had deserted her and had gone to California, and I told this man that if I ever met the wretch I would kill him on sight, even though I died the next instant!" the skirt-dancer declared in conclusion.

"And you would be perfectly justified in so doing," the Serio-Comic decided. "It is my notion, too, that under such circumstances no jury would convict you."

"Well, that is something I never troubled my head about; in fact I have not given the matter a thought. I am Spanish by descent and it is the nature of the people of my race to take vengeance into their own hands when they are wronged."

"Yes, I am aware of that fact."

"This is one of those cases where the law cannot give me the vengeance I crave."

"You would only be able to prosecute him for bigamy, and for forging your name so as to get the money out of the bank," the other suggested; "and as you were married to him in New Orleans, and the robbery also took place there, you might have a good deal of trouble in proving the man to be a rascal."

"Yes, I suppose I would, and even if I could succeed in having him convicted, his punishment would not amount to anything."

"Nothing more than a term of imprisonment," Rosamond replied.

"That would not satisfy me at all!" the skirt-dancer protested. "It is the man's life for which I hunger!"

"Perhaps you think I am bloodthirsty? It is the truth, I am! That miserable wretch ruined all my life; why, under such circumstances, is it not just that his life should pay the forfeit?"

"Well, I don't know as you ought to be blamed for thinking so about the matter," Rosamond remarked.

"In a case like this, the law does not mete out to the offender the punishment which he justly deserves."

"A fellow of this kind goes through the world ruining the lives of the unfortunate women whom he selects for victims, and if Justice does finally succeed in getting him by the collar, all the punishment inflicted is a few years in jail."

"It is because the men make the laws!" Florence declared. "And they are seldom just to women."

"But I shall not trouble the courts to do me justice," she continued. "Once let me get within reach of him, and I will speedily avenge my wrongs with my own hand!"

"But do you think you will be able to find him, even if he is in the city? Chicago is a big place, you know."

"Yes, for I shall trust to chance to bring us together. One advantage I possess: I know that he is in the city, and he is not aware that I am here. I shall get a blonde wig, so as to disguise myself, and shall go around all I can, and in time I will be sure to meet him," the skirt-dancer avowed.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TEXAN'S WARNING.

THE interview was interrupted by the appearance of the servant girl with a letter for Rosamond.

It was from the Texan comedian, as he called himself, Johnny Jimplecute, and asked if she would have the kindness to meet him at the stage-door of the Glorious Alcazar right after she got through with her first turn that evening, as he had something of importance to say to her.

As the letter had come by post it was not possible for her to send a reply, as no address was given.

"He, probably, is anxious to get another dollar," was the Serio-Comic's thought.

"And I think by rights that I ought to make it five this time, if he needs the money, for he most materially contributed to my success on the occasion of my first appearance."

Rosamond had retired to her own apartment to read the letter, and so she could give free utterance to her thoughts.

That night upon leaving the stage at the completion of her performance she proceeded to the stage-door, which was in the rear of the building.

As it happened, there were no houses upon the other side of the street, only some vacant lots, and as the street was seldom used by pedestrians at this hour of the night, there was little danger that an interview would be either interrupted or overheard.

The Texan was in waiting, and greeted the Serio-Comic with an elaborate bow as she appeared.

"Gentle lady, you are most welcome!" he declared in his ridiculous way, as soon as Rosamond came out.

"I have a communication which I think will be of interest to you, and would you step this way a yard or two, so that no sneaking galoot kin glue his ear to the door for to overhear our words?"

The street was dimly lighted, but there was a bright moon, and as it was in such a position that the back of the theater was in the shadow, the pair were shielded from observation, yet were able to note the approach of any one.

"Of course you don't know much about me," the comedian began. "And yet you had the sand to go a dollar on me at the first pop."

"Ah, yes, but you looked as if you really needed the money, you know."

"Well, I did!" the Texan admitted. "That is a sure enuff fact, and there ain't no discount on it, either."

"The action showed that your heart was in the right place, and you kin bet all you are worth, or ever expect to be worth, that I am ready to do all I kin for you at any time, and at any place, and that is the kind of a hairpin I am, me noble dook!"

"Oh, that is all right," the Serio-Comic rejoined. "You need not allow the weight of obligation to crush you."

"But if a chance came in my way to do you a good turn don't you s'pose I would jump at it, hey?" the bumner demanded with a great deal of dignity.

"Yes, I don't doubt that you would."

"Thar's a good old biblical saying, you know, 'bout 'casting your bread on the waters,' and I reckon it comes true a heap of times oftener than folks think, although this is a mighty unsart'in world," the comedian said with the air of a philosopher.

"Yes, I agree with you in regard to that."

"You shared your wealth with me when you didn't have much to share, and thar is whar the merits of the deed comes in!" the comedian declared.

"Tain't so great for a galoot to chuck out his coin when he's got plenty, but it takes the nerve to put up the ducats when a feller is about down to the bed-rock."

"That is true enough."

"Now, though I did whoop up things pretty well for you on your first appearance, yet I don't consider that I have squared the debt, and I am ready to put in the big licks for you whenever I git a chance."

"Well, I am much obliged, of course," the Serio-Comic observed, somewhat puzzled to guess what the man was driving at, for

this did not seem to be the sort of a preliminary leading to a request for "wealth."

"Oh, I am a friend of yours, and you can bet high on thatt!"

"Glad to hear it."

"And now I'll come to the p'int."

He dropped his voice almost to a whisper as he came to the end of the sentence, and looked cautiously around him.

"I want to be sure, you know, that thar isn't anybody in the neighborhood a sneakin' around for to catch on to what I am saying," he declared, in a cautious tone.

"Yes, I see."

"Jimmy Richmond is in Chicago!" he said, in a hoarse whisper, and in a tragical way.

"Jimmy Richmond?" the Serio-Comic asked, in a questioning tone.

"Yes, you know!" the comedian replied, with a wise look, but evidently surprised that the announcement had not produced more of an effect.

"No, I don't know; I don't know any Jimmy Richmond, and I am sure that it doesn't make any difference to me whether he is in the city or not—or any other Jimmy, for that matter."

"Mebbe you know him by another name?" the comedian remarked.

"Yes, that is possible."

"He is a gambler from New Orleans."

"I don't know any man who answers to that description."

"There is something rotten, then, in Denmark!" the Texan declared, in a tragical way.

"I jumped to the conclusion that you was the woman he was aiming at, but mebbe I am a little off."

"You see, I used to know him in Orleans, and when I run across him here in Chicago, I went for him with the idea of winning a stake," the comedian explained.

"He is a sharp feller, you understand, but sharp as he is, he made the mistake of thinking that I was as big a rascal as he is; but, though I will have to acknowledge that I have kept some mighty bad company in my time—due, of course, to the yearning that I have for the potent bug-juice—yet I have allers been keeful to live within the letter of the law, so that all the cops and peelers in the world have no terrors for my soul!"

"That is where your head is level!" the girl observed, approvingly.

"And the galoot had the sand to tell me that there was a woman at the Glorious Alcazar whom a friend of his'n wanted to have put out of the way."

"Why, the cold-blooded rascal!"

"He said there was a hundred ducats in the job, and if I could find a man who would be willing to do the trick, he would give me ten for my trouble."

"Liberal! wasn't he?"

"You bet! and he put up five cases right on the spot, so as to show that he was in dead earnest."

"And you got the idea that I was the woman whose absence from this world of care was desired?"

"Well, I did now, for a sure-enuff fact!" the comedian assented.

"No, I am not the one; but, I say, I think there is an opportunity to make a stake out of this rascal," the Serio-Comic remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, and such a fellow as this I consider to be fair game."

"Oh, yes, I agree with you thar, most high and mighty princess!"

"You go to the man and tell him that you have found a fellow who will be likely to take the job; a young Italian, who, although he isn't much more than a boy, has been mixed up in some ugly rows, and has the reputation of being ready to use the knife upon the slightest provocation."

"Ah, yes, I see," and the Texan shook his head approvingly.

"That is a mighty good lay out, and the yarn is such a probable one, too, for some of these Italians are reg'lar p'ison snakes."

"Of course you can say that you don't know much of anything about the fellow, excepting that he bears the reputation of being a pretty bad egg, and when you sounded him in regard to doing a job of this kind, he seemed to be willing to do almost anything, provided he was to be well paid for it, and

there was a fair chance of his getting off without being caught."

"Yes, yes! Oh, I kin fix the thing up in first-class style!" the comedian declared.

"In a case of this kind, I think any one is perfectly justified in making a stake out of a man who is willing to hire another one to commit murder."

"Oh, sart'in!" the Texan exclaimed. "He is fair game!"

"This Italian boy that I speak of is a sharp fellow, and you can rely upon him to play the game in the right way."

"I'll do all I kin to help the thing along," the comedian declared.

"I will jest notify the sport that I have found a feller who, I think, will do the trick."

"You can make arrangements with him to meet the Italian, and then come and tell me all the particulars."

"I'll do it, and I'll meet you hyer tomorrow night, at this same time."

"All right! I will expect you."

And this ended the interview.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FRENCHMAN.

AFTER re-entering the theater Rosamond seated herself upon a box, which stood in an obscure corner of the stage, and fell to meditating.

"I think I have the clue to this mystery," she murmured.

"This James Richmond, the gambler from New Orleans, is the James Alexander who treated Florence so badly."

"By some accident he has discovered that she is in Chicago, and the guilty conscience of the man troubles him."

"It may be possible, too, that he is lacking in courage, and fears that if the girl discovers him she may be inclined to take the law into her own hands."

"As a rule gamblers are plucky men, but once in a while there is one with a 'yellow streak' in him, and who will not 'stand the steel,' as the sports say."

"The skirt-dancer is the woman who is to be put out of the way."

"The error that this fat vagabond made in regard to myself was natural enough though."

"The fellow is a keen-witted rascal, and he was shrewd enough to detect that there was some mystery about me, so when he heard that the death of one of the performers in this theater was desired he jumped immediately to the conclusion that I was the party."

"Now, then, the question is, how shall I proceed?"

And the girl debated the matter in her mind for a few moments.

"I don't think there is a doubt that this is the man whom Florence is so anxious to meet that she may avenge her wrongs."

"Now, while there is hardly a question but what he deserves to be killed, yet I don't really relish the idea of leading the man on to his death."

"It is too much like playing the executioner and the part is repugnant to me."

"But he ought to be made to do justice to the woman whom he has wronged," she continued, thoughtfully.

"Suppose I arrange it in this way—suppose I arrange a trap for him, and after he is caged make him pay a good round sum to get out, the money to go to Florence."

"I presume there isn't a doubt but what she would prefer blood to money, but I am not anxious that the man's death should lie at my door."

"If he isn't in funds, though, the trick can't be worked."

"But if he is willing to give a hundred to get Florence out of the way, it would seem as if he had considerable money."

"After I meet this gentleman, I reckon I will have to do a little shadow business so as to ascertain just how he is situated."

"Egad! I am getting my hands full of work!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed, as she rose to her feet.

"I came to Chicago to attend to one job, and now, lo and behold! I have three complex and difficult cases, all of which require my immediate attention."

"Well, the more the merrier, but so far I have not made any progress on the original

job, and I must try and see if I can't get ahead a little."

Then the girl went to the wine-room.

As it happened, business was extremely dull.

The attendance that evening was very poor, and the few auditors who had found their way into the theater were not inclined to spend their money in the wine-room.

In all theaters of this kind there are always a few hangers-on, either friends of the manager or of the performers, who have the run of the place, and they are not expected to spend money, but drink whenever asked, and thus increase the receipts of the place.

These hangers-on, and one stranger, who was conversing with Miss Sutherland, the other serio-comic, and Florence Valentine, who was chatting with the proprietor, the fat German, were all who were in the place when Rosamond entered.

The Serio-Comic took a seat at the table where Florence and the manager sat, remarking as she did so:

"Business isn't very rushing to-night, Mr. Grundbaum."

"I should say it was not! A graveyard would be a fool to displace for liveliness!" the manager exclaimed.

And then he rose with a disgusted air and retreated to the auditorium.

"The main guy is a bad loser," Rosamond remarked.

"Oh, yes, he is always grumbling. Still, I don't wonder at his being dissatisfied, for the place hasn't done any business since it opened."

"Who is that gentleman Sutherland is talking to—an 'angel' whom she has succeeded in picking up?"

As we have not described the other serio-comic, we will now take the opportunity to say that she was a rather tall, well-proportioned woman of thirty or thereabouts.

Her features were a little irregular, but strong and full of expression, and she had a wealth of blonde hair which she wore in the most becoming manner.

And as soon as Rosamond had seen her she at once came to the conclusion that she was a woman with a history.

From her appearance and her peculiar intonation it was evident that she was English by birth.

The gentleman with whom she was conversing—the pair were seated at a table in a corner of the room apart from the rest—was rather undersized, and effeminate in his appearance.

A good-looking fellow with dark eyes and hair, an olive complexion, evidently a foreigner, a Frenchman apparently.

He was dressed in the height of fashion, and seemed to be a man who was extremely careful of his personal appearance.

"Well, I don't know what to make of that fellow," Florence remarked in a thoughtful way.

"He has been coming to the place now ever since it opened, and from the beginning he seemed to take a fancy to Sutherland, although he never spends much money on her, but she accounts for that by saying that he isn't any fool, and that if any one picks him up for a flat they will make a great mistake."

"I see; she looks upon him in the light of a friend, and not as a victim."

"Yes, I suppose that is the idea."

"His name is De Moroy—Ambrose De Moroy, and Sutherland says that he comes from one of the best families in France, and is worth lots of money. He has come to this country expressly to see the great Fair."

"Well, women of her class always make it a point of telling a good story, you know."

And then the Serio-Comic surveyed the man in a critical manner.

"He dresses nicely and looks like a gentleman, but if he really amounted to anything I don't believe he would find much amusement in hanging around a place of this kind," Rosamond observed.

"Oh, I don't take any stock in her story at all!" Florence declared.

"I do not believe that the man is a gentleman born and bred, or that he has got much wealth, although he seems to have plenty of money, but as far as that goes Sutherland herself always has a big roll of bills, and she

has some very nice diamonds, too, which must have cost a pretty penny."

"Well, I don't see where she could have got them, or how she could accumulate much wealth," the Serio-Comic observed, thoughtfully.

"She doesn't amount to much as a performer."

"Yes, I know that; her voice is only fair, and she sings without any expression whatever, but she dresses magnificently, and understands how to act her songs, so that her appearance and acting carry her through."

"I don't like the woman, though, for there is something peculiar and odd about her."

"The man is a good match, too, for her, for he has some very odd ways."

"How so? Explain, for I take an interest in odd people," Rosamond declared.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS SUTHERLAND.

"EXPLAIN, eh?" the skirt-dancer said, in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, you don't mind, do you?" the Serio-Comic asked.

"As I said, I take a decided interest in odd and peculiar people, and I can see that this man is a little out of the common run," Rosamond continued.

"Well, I don't know as I can give a very clear explanation," the skirt-dancer observed.

"And, mind you, I can only give you my impressions, and, perhaps, they are not correct."

"Of course, in a case of this kind you can only guess at the truth, and the correctness depends upon how good a guesser one is."

"Yes, that is the truth, and I have always had the idea that I could form a tolerably accurate opinion of people's characters without knowing much about them."

"My mother was of Spanish Gypsy blood, and I always believed that I inherited a skill for reading character from her."

"The children of the Zingari race, you know, have been fortune-tellers from the Dark Ages."

"Yes, I am aware that it is a gift which they have always claimed to possess, but I will have to admit that I have always been a little incredulous in regard to the matter, for it is my opinion that the most of the Gypsy race, the Romany sons and daughters, are disposed to claim a great deal more than they are honestly entitled to—more than they could prove."

"Well, I certainly made a great mistake in regard to my husband, for my instinct did not warn me that he was a rascal," the skirt-dancer observed, thoughtfully.

"But then I accounted for my failure in his case because I had fallen in love with him, and my passion clouded my judgment."

"Yes, there is something in that, certainly," Rosamond assented.

"In regard to this Frenchman I have an impression that he is a rascal," the skirt-dancer declared.

"Of course he may be all that Sutherland asserts him to be—a man of good family, holding a fine position, and with plenty of money, but I do not think that he is a man who can be trusted for all that."

"Oh, there is many a rascal occupying a good position, and with plenty of money at his command, too, so that doesn't prove anything."

"But I do not believe that it is true that he is a gentleman of wealth, although the man seems used to good society, and knows how to behave himself."

"There are certain queer ways that he has though which makes me suspicious."

"For instance, when there are a number of strangers in the room here, I have noticed that he surveys them in a peculiar way, taking care to time his observations so that the men will not detect his scrutiny."

"Well, that is certainly strange," Rosamond observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, and on five or six occasions he has contrived to make the acquaintance of some of these strangers—and I notice that the men have always been well-dressed, middle-aged gentlemen, who looked as if they might amount to something—and then introduced them to Miss Sutherland."

"Was that to give her an opportunity to fascinate them?"

"Well, it certainly had that appearance to my thinking," Florence replied.

"Does she seem to be of the bird of prey order, looking around for victims?" the Serio-Comic inquired, carelessly.

"Humph! I don't know as I ought to say that I am satisfied that she is a woman of that kind, but I don't mind telling you that I have my suspicions in regard to her."

"She looks to me like a woman with a remarkably strong will, and I don't believe she would allow her conscience to trouble her any if she concluded to do something that wasn't exactly right."

"Yes; that is just the opinion I have of her," the skirt-dancer declared.

"And there is another strange thing about her, too," Florence continued.

"She apparently doesn't want any one to know where she lives."

"Is that so?" the Serio-Comic asked, in surprise.

"Yes, it is the custom, you know, for all the performers to give their address to the stage-manager, so they can be summoned in case they are wanted at any time when they are not in the theater."

"I know."

"Well, I happened to hear the address which Miss Sutherland gave, and when I took a walk one Sunday morning I passed through the street."

"Yes?"

"Well, the number she gave is a vacant lot; in fact, there isn't but one house in the block, and that is a low tenement occupied by a lot of Italians."

"That is very strange."

"And then, in order to satisfy myself in regard to the matter, I spoke to her one night in the dressing-room in regard to getting a room at the house where she was staying, pretending, you know, that I thought of changing."

"She replied immediately that there were no vacant rooms in the house, and as the accommodations were very poor, she thought of moving."

"She did not want you to come."

"Yes, it was very evident, and I think that it is rather suspicious."

"It certainly looks so to me, and although I do not pretend to be much of a judge of character, yet from her appearance I have got the idea that she would not hesitate to make a victim out of a man if she thought there was a good bit of money to be made."

"Well, I think you are correct in that surmise," the skirt-dancer assented.

"It is my impression that she is very deep and dangerous, and I would not be willing to trust the woman any further than I could see her!" Florence continued.

At this point the skirt-dancer was summoned to the stage, and so the conversation ended.

"I think I have a clue at last," Rosamond murmured.

"And now, then, it will be my game to cultivate the acquaintance of Miss Sutherland and this Frenchman of noble birth, who appears to me to bear all the earmarks of an adventurer."

CHAPTER XV.

A FRANK DISCUSSION.

THE Serio-Comic reflected upon the situation for awhile.

"I must proceed with great caution," she mused. "For I have an idea from the way the woman has surveyed me on several occasions when she thought I was not looking, that she is a little puzzled about me, and is rather inclined to be suspicious."

"Now then, my game is to make her believe that I am of the same class to which she belongs—a woman with a past which will not bear investigation, and who is not scrupulous how she makes money as long as she succeeds in getting the cash."

"It is too much for me to expect that I will be able to win her confidence, for if she is half as shrewd as I believe her to be, she will not be apt to give anything away."

"If I can succeed in making her think that I am an adventuress, always ready to plunder a victim if I can catch one, she may be thrown off her guard and speak so freely that I can get an idea whether she is the party I want or not."

Acting on this idea, Rosamond sauntered over to the table where Miss Sutherland sat.

"Isn't it dreadful dull," the Serio-Comic said. "If I had had any idea that things were going to be like this I would not have come to this place, for I like to be where it is lively, and there is some fun going on."

Rosamond's remarks were interrupted at this point by a summons to the stage, for it was time for her to go on.

As she came off the stage, at the conclusion of her performance, she encountered the stage-manager.

"Is there any use of my going into the wine room?—there's nobody there," she asked.

"Well, it is a rule of the house, of course, for all the performers to go there, and stay until the end of the show, but as the boss has cleared out in disgust, and there's no chance for business, I reckon you need not go to-night."

"There is only about half an hour more, anyway," Miss Sutherland observed, having come up just in time to overhear the conversation.

"And there are only a couple of young fellows in there," she added.

"Both of them have all the liquor on board that they ought to carry too, and as they have spent all their money, nothing can be made out of them. The chances are, too, that the bouncer will have to put them out."

"You needn't any of you go there again to-night," the stage-manager remarked.

"When you get through your acts you can go home."

The girls thanked him, and then proceeded to their dressing-rooms.

"Well, this isn't the sort of thing I expected at all when I came here!" the Serio-Comic declared.

"I took a low salary, for I thought there would be a chance for me to catch on to some nice fellow, with plenty of money, who wanted a wife, but I have not seen a single man who would do at all, with the exception of your gentleman friend, Miss Sutherland, and I suppose you have a mortgage on him."

"Oh, no, he is not one of the marrying kind," the Englishwoman replied.

"He is a nice fellow, and I knew him across the water, but there isn't any love affair between us."

"We are only good friends, that is all."

"Well, I don't know as I am a very good judge of character, but it strikes me that he is not the kind of man to allow any woman to make a fool of him," Rosamond remarked.

"You are quite right," Miss Sutherland declared. "He is a perfect gentleman, but as he has traveled all over the world, he has seen a great deal of life, and any one who succeeds in getting the best of him will have to rise very early in the morning."

"There isn't any chance for me, then!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed, with a laugh.

"Well, I am sorry, for I was in hopes to find some nice fellow with plenty of money, and, so far, he is the only one I have seen who has at all come up to my ideas."

"I don't like this sort of life at all!" Rosamond exclaimed in an impulsive way.

"But when a woman is without a natural protector, and is obliged to look out for herself, she is obliged to do something to make a living, and this is the easiest way for me to accomplish that feat; and then, in a place of this kind, a woman always stands a chance to meet with some nice fellow who possesses wealth and can be entrapped, if the woman is at all smart."

"I don't like to hear you talk like that!" Florence declared.

"And I will say right out, too, that I had a better opinion of you!" she continued.

"Why, I wouldn't marry the best man in the world if I did not love him, and it would not make any difference to me if he had a dozen millions!"

"If you had had as hard a time to get along as I have experienced, I bet you would change your mind," Rosamond remarked.

"A great many men look upon women as their natural prey," the Serio-Comic continued.

"And it seems to me that it is only fair that some of the lords of creation should be transformed into victims once in a while."

"I think that is correct," Miss Sutherland observed.

"For my part, I can tell you that I would not hesitate to get the best of a man if I could, and if the fellow had plenty of money, I should not feel any compunctions in getting possession of all I could of his cash."

"Well, of course, we cannot all think alike in this world," Florence remarked.

"And therefore it isn't strange that I am not able to agree with you two at all, although I have been cruelly treated by a man, but I don't blame the rest for what he has done, and I would not allow any fellow to waste his money on me."

"If I loved him, I should want him to save his money, and if I did not love him, I would not have anything to do with him."

"That is all very well, but money is the great thing in this world, and I, for one, don't hesitate to say that I am going to get hold of all I can, and I shall not be too particular, either, as to the means by which I gain possession of the cash," Miss Sutherland declared.

"Well, I suppose I will have to admit that if I came across a man fool enough to throw his money away on me, I would probably allow him to do so," the Serio-Comic observed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SOUTHERNER.

THE discussion did not proceed further, for there came a rap on the dressing-room door and the voice of Johnson, the old stage-manager, came to the ears of the three.

"Hurry up and dress, ladies, as soon as you can, for the wind has blown a gay and festive old galoot into the wine-room, and the odds are big that he will be good for two or three bottles of wine, for he has got a wad of bills as big as a brick, and he doesn't seem to be at all afraid to throw out his wealth."

Rosamond was looking in the glass, adjusting her hat, when this announcement was made, and although not apparently paying any attention to her companions, yet she had a full view of their features, and therefore was able to see the expression which appeared upon their faces as they listened to the words of the old actor. There was a quick gleam of fire in Miss Sutherland's cold eyes, and she shut her thin lips firmly together.

"Aha! she is a genuine bird of prey," the Serio-Comic muttered under her breath.

"And she scents the game from afar!"

Upon Florence's face though was a look of annoyance.

"Oh, bother!" she cried.

"I wish the wind had blown the old guy in somewhere else!"

"I am all ready to go home now! I am tired, and I want to go to bed."

"Ah, yes; but it is business before pleasure, you know!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed. "And since fate has sent us an angel, we must do our best to improve the chance."

"Certainly! that is correct, and we would be great fools not to take advantage of the opportunity," Miss Sutherland declared.

"We will be out in a moment, Mr. Johnson," she continued, addressing the stage-manager.

"All right; but hurry up, for I don't want this man to get away until he has opened some wine for the good of the house," the old actor remarked.

Then Miss Sutherland opened the door.

"We are all ready now," she said.

"I wouldn't have troubled you, but really the opportunity was too good to be lost," the stage manager explained.

"The gentleman is a major from Kentucky, who has come to Chicago for the purpose of having a good time, and I judge that he is a man of large wealth, for he doesn't seem to value his money any more than if it was so much water."

"That is just the kind of man we are looking for, eh, girls?" the Englishwoman declared.

"Oh, yes, we will help him to spend his cash!" the Serio-Comic asserted.

"Well, it is business, of course, and we must do it to get our living; but if I could help it I would not have anything to do with these silly fools who imagine they are cutting a great dash when they come into a

place of this sort, and throw a few dollars away," Florence remarked.

"Oh, well, such fellows are fair game, you know," the old actor remarked. "And as long as they are determined to get rid of their money, they may as well spend some of it here as elsewhere. Sometimes it is true that they make themselves a little disagreeable, but we cannot expect to go through this world without having considerable trouble, and we might as well make up our minds to make the best of it."

The stage-manager spoke with the air of a philosopher, as he proceeded in advance of the ladies to the wine-room.

When the party entered the apartment they found the Kentuckian, seated at a table, with Charley Michaelmas, and his partner, Billy Dougan, the bones-player, and the Frenchman, De Moroy.

"Major Magoffin, let me make you acquainted with our ladies," the stage-manager said as he presented the three.

The gentleman rose with alacrity, and declared that he was delighted to have the pleasure of making their acquaintance.

He was a notable looking man, this Kentuckian.

Large in stature, and rather inclined to be portly, a man of sixty, or thereabouts, with a massive face, fringed with iron-gray locks, worn rather long, and combed over the ears in the old-fashioned Southwestern style; a new beard, sprouting on his chin and upper lip, gave him a rather rough appearance, and his face was of a florid hue, apparently a sign that the gentleman was not only fond of the good things of this life, but had had ample opportunities to gratify his tastes.

He was dressed in a costly suit, sported a heavy gold watch-chain, wore a handsome solitaire diamond pin in his shirt-bosom, and had an equally handsome diamond ring on the little finger of his left hand.

Any judge of diamonds could have told at a glance that the two stones never cost less than a thousand dollars.

"You have jes' come in time, ladies, to join us in a little social drink," the Kentuckian remarked, speaking with the slight accent peculiar to the natives of the region from which he came.

"Bring us a couple of bottles of champagne, waitah," the gentleman requested.

"Do me the honah to be seated, ladies," the Kentuckian continued, with a gallant bow.

They complied with the request, and then the major resumed his chair.

"I did not have the pleasure of arriving at the theater this evening in time to witness any of your performances upon the stage, but I shall make it a point to be present to-morrow evening, for I am very fond of singing and dancing."

The appearance of the waiter with the champagne interrupted the speech.

"Aha! heah is the glorious water of life!" the Kentuckian exclaimed.

"There isn't anything in this world that I enjoy, ladies and gentlemen, more than a glass of good champagne," he continued, as the waiter proceeded to open and serve the wine.

"Really, though, two bottles will hardly be a taste for us," the major remarked, in a reflective way, as he surveyed his guests.

"Waitah, you can bring two more bottles, and then we will all be sure to get enough so as to be able to tell how the wine tastes."

And as the gentleman finished the speech, he took a big roll of bills from an inside pocket of his coat, and taking off the outside one, which was a fifty-dollar note, threw it upon the table.

"Take the damages out of that, waitah!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, in the most respectful manner, for the free-and-easy Kentuckian, with his lordly way, had made a decided impression on him.

"Get a drink out of it for yourself, too!" the major exclaimed.

"By the way, get two drinks, for the first one might be lonely!" he continued.

All the party laughed, for they comprehended that it was the major's idea that he had said something witty, and they were quite willing to agree with the man who tossed out a fifty-dollar bill as carelessly as the average customer does a one.

"Now then, we will drink to the health of these charming ladies!" the Kentuckian said, in the most gallant manner.

The toast was duly drank, and then the Kentuckian hastened to have the glasses refilled.

"I shall probably be in Chicago for a month or so, for I intend to see all of this great Fair that is worth seeing, and that will give me ample opportunity to become well acquainted with you, ladies."

"I am a great theater-goer, you understand, and I always take a huge delight in making the acquaintance of the ladies and gentlemen of the stage."

All of the party immediately hastened to assure the gentleman that they appreciated the compliment, and the old stage-manager proposed the health of Major Magoffin.

The others responded rapturously to this, and so the toast was drank with all the honors.

The waiter now arrived with two more bottles of champagne.

"You are just in time!" the Kentuckian declared, as he proceeded to refill the glasses. "We will need a fresh supply very soon."

"Your change, sir," said the waiter.

"Did you get a couple of drinks for yourself?" the major demanded.

"Yes, sir; I did, sir, and I am much obliged, sir," the man responded with a grin, as he handed the change to the Kentuckian.

He had taken the precaution to bring some half-dollars and quarters, so that if the gentleman should take it into his head to bestow a "tip" upon him, the change would be handy.

The waiter had not made a miscalculation in regard to the character of the man, for as soon as the Kentuckian received the change he took out a quarter which he bestowed upon the grinning waiter, then crumpled the rest up in a mass and thrust it into his side-pocket in the most careless possible manner.

"Now fire away, and open another bottle while we finish this one," the major said.

"How late is it?" he asked abruptly, and then he took out his watch, a massive, elaborate affair, which must have cost a deal of money.

"After eleven!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Why, I had no idea that it was so late," he continued.

"After we finish the wine I will have to tear myself away, ladies and gentlemen, for it is some distance to my hotel down-town."

"Where are you staying?" De Moroy asked.

"At the Sherman House, and that is just where I made a mistake," the Kentuckian remarked.

"It is altogether too far away from the Fair grounds, you know."

"Oh, yes; it is a considerable distance," Miss Sutherland remarked, with her sweetest smile.

"But, you see, I have always been used to stopping there for years, and when I came to the city it was the most natural thing in the world to go there."

"Man, you see, is such a creature of habit," the Kentuckian continued.

"I should think you would get a room up in this neighborhood so that you would be convenient to the Fair grounds," Rosamond observed.

"That is exactly what I intend to do," the major replied.

"It is my intention to get one to-morrow."

"I should not be surprised if you could get one in the house where Miss Valentine and I are staying," the Serio-Comic remarked.

"It is a very nice, quiet house, and the rooms are beautiful."

"I think you would be suited, for there is only the old couple, who own the house, and Miss Valentine and myself in the place."

"Yes, yes, that is just about what I want," the major declared.

"Give me the address, please; I will make a note of it and call to-morrow," and as the Kentuckian spoke he produced a card and pencil.

Rosamond gave him the address, which he wrote upon the card.

Miss Sutherland took advantage of the major's attention being fixed upon the card to cast a spiteful glance at the Serio-Comic,

but Rosamond only smiled in return, just as though she considered that she had gained a point.

"I am going down town, to the neighborhood of the Sherman House, and I will keep you company," the Frenchman remarked.

"Now, are you, really?" the Kentuckian exclaimed. "Well, I am delighted to hear it, for being a man I am a gregarious animal, and hate to travel around alone."

"But now ladies and gentlemen, we will finish the wine, and then you will have to excuse me, but I will have the pleasure of seeing you again to-morrow evening."

"And you will be sure not to forget to come?" Miss Sutherland exclaimed, with a coquettish air.

"Oh, no, you can depend upon me, I give you my word as to that!" the major replied, immediately, with a gallant bow.

"It is always a source of great pleasure for me to make the acquaintance of jolly people in your profession, for there is a lack of that formality which appertains to society, and which I cordially detest."

"Being a stranger here in Chicago, and really without a single acquaintance, for it is over twenty years since I have been in the city, it is no wonder that I am somewhat lonesome."

"But now I will give you a final toast: here is to our better acquaintance!"

The toast was drank, and then the major and the Frenchman departed.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TRUE KENTUCKIAN.

AFTER getting into the street, the major passed his arm through that of his companion in the most friendly manner.

"By Jove! sah, I can tell you that I am heartily delighted that fortune led my wandering footsteps into that little theater to-night, sah, for the circumstance procured me the pleasure of making the acquaintance of those three charming ladies."

"Yes, they are nice girls."

"Deuced fine women, my dear fellow, I assure you!" the major exclaimed, in an enthusiastic manner.

"We Kentuckians are judges of that sort of thing, you know."

"When it comes to wine, women and horses, it is Kentucky against the world!"

"Kentucky first, the world nowhere!"

From the way in which the major spoke the Frenchman got the idea that the liquor had begun to take effect upon him.

"I believe that is correct," De Moroy remarked, his idea being to humor his companion.

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt about it!" the major declared.

"But it is particularly in regard to women that the sons of Kentucky shine pre-eminent."

"Why, the old song recognizes the fact:

"Send for us Kentucky boys and we'll protect the ladies!"

"And that is a sure enough fact, sir, begad!" the major continued.

"Yes, I have never heard it disputed."

"And what I like about these ladies is that while there is none of the formality of the dames and daughters of society about them, yet there is nothing coarse or forward," the major explained.

"Oh, no; they certainly know how to behave themselves."

"They do, indeed, for a fact. Dear, delightful creatures!" cried the Kentuckian, in a burst of enthusiasm.

"You must really excuse my speaking in such a familiar tone of your lady friends, but, 'pon my honah, sah, I don't think that in all my life I ever met three ladies who made such a decided impression upon me upon so short an acquaintance."

"Oh, there is no doubt that they are three charming girls, and I do not wonder that you are impressed so decidedly in their favor."

"I anticipate that we will have a delightful time together, for you see, my dear fellow, I have the rocks—the wherewithal to entertain the ladies in a becoming manner."

"Of course, these Chicago people don't know anything about me, but when I am home in Harrodsburg in old Kentuck, I tell you, sah, I am a great gun!" the major declared in an impressive manner.

"I own a thousand acres of as fine a soil as the sun ever shone on, begad!"

"And there's no better stock to be found in Kentucky—or in the wide world, sah, than I can show on my place."

"And I have come to Chicago to have a good time—a rip-roaring time, as the boys say, my dear fellow, you understand?"

"Oh, yes; and I do not doubt that you will be able to enjoy yourself."

"You bet your life on that, sah!" the Kentuckian exclaimed.

"And why shouldn't I have a good time?" he continued.

"I have plenty of money, and I mean to have all the pleasure that money can buy."

"You see, my dear fellow, I have laid out ten thousand dollars for this trip, and I am not going to leave Chicago until I have blown it all in, as the sports say!"

And then the major laughed heartily, as though he considered that he had said a good thing.

There was a gleam in the eyes of the Frenchman and his thin lips came together in a peculiar way.

"Ten thousand dollars, eh, major?" he said.

"Yes, sah; that is the sum, exactly, and, as I said, I am not going to leave the city until I have spent it."

"I understand how to get the worth of my money, you understand!" the Kentuckian continued. "No man ever yet picked Major Dan'l Magoffin up for a flat without coming to a speedy conclusion that he had been guilty of making the biggest kind of a mistake."

"Why, major, to use our French expression, that goes without saying!" De Moroy observed.

"I come, sah, from one of the best families in ole Kentuck!" Major Magoffin declared.

"We have always held our own with the best of them, yes, sah, the Magoffins have always enjoyed the esteem and confidence of their fellow-citizens."

"Why, sah, it was only a year ago that a large number of the best men in the State called upon me and requested that I would go into politics and accept the nomination for governor, and when a man is nominated for governor in Kentucky on the Democratic ticket it is equivalent to an election."

"Ah, yes, I see, but as I am a stranger I know but little of the politics of the country."

"Of course, that is to be expected under the circumstances."

"It does take some time for a foreigner to get the hang of the thing!" the Kentuckian remarked in his genial way.

"Why, I don't suppose that you ever heard the celebrated remark which the Governor of the State of North Carolina once made to the Governor of the State of South Carolina."

The face of the major was grave and earnest as he spoke, but there was a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"No, sir, I don't remember to have ever heard of it," the Frenchman answered.

"Well, sah, the one governor, sah, said to the other governor, sah, in a strictly confidential manner, mind you, 'It is a long time between drinks, ha, ha, ha!'" and the Kentuckian laughed, loudly.

Of course his companion joined in the merriment, although he did not see anything particularly funny in the speech.

"Remarkably witty saying, you know, and so full of truth, too; and that reminds me that it would not be a bad idea if we went in here and wet our whistles!" exclaimed the Kentuckian, steering his companion to the door of one of the gorgeous saloons which Chicago presents for the admiration of the dwellers within her gates.

"That is a capital idea!" De Moroy exclaimed.

This proposition suited the Frenchman admirably.

He could see that the Kentuckian was already visibly affected by the liquor which he had drank, and it was his calculation that a few more drinks would put him in a condition so that he would not be capable of taking care of himself.

"Yes, sah, you are quite right, sah!" the major declared.

"In parliamentary language it may be said that an invitation to drink is always in order," he continued, jocosely.

"And this time, if you will be guided by my advice you will not waste your time in drinking champagne."

"No, sah, we will fall back on the pure mountain dew distilled on the green hillsides of Kentucky, good ole Bourbon whisky!"

"Ahal my dear fellow!" and the major smacked his lips as if in delightful anticipation. "That is the nectar, I am sure that we read about in the ancient tales, which the gods sipped on high Olympus."

"No wishy-washy wine, but the wholesome juice of the corn which gives life and strength to man."

"Yes, I am very fond of your American whisky," the Frenchman remarked as the two entered the saloon.

But it was his thought that if in his present condition the major took a few drinks of his favorite fluid it would certainly take his strength away instead of giving him any more.

In the saloon the major greeted the bartender in his genial way and asked him to be kind enough to set out the best Bourbon whisky that he had in the house, explaining that he was a Kentuckian and knew what good whisky was.

The amiable gentleman behind the bar immediately replied that he had some Kentucky Bourbon that he could recommend as being fit for any gentleman of taste and discrimination.

The liquor was produced, and the major, with a courtly bow, pushed the bottle to De Moroy.

And he, in order to lead his companion on, took a generous quantity.

But the Kentuckian took nearly a finger more, and then in his genial way invited the bartender to join them.

And the major had such a winning way with him that the presiding genius was unable to resist the temptation, although, as he said:

"Well, gents, I will take a small snifter, just to show you that the fluid won't kill you outright, although it is my rule never to drink behind the bar."

"One little dose ought not to count," the Kentuckian argued.

"It is pretty near closing-up time anyway, so I will go you!" the bartender declared.

Then the three duly saluted each other and disposed of the whisky.

"Have another!" exclaimed the Kentuckian, pushing the bottle toward the Frenchman, and then, throwing a ten-dollar bill on the counter, said, "Take 'em out of this!"

De Moroy accepted the invitation quickly enough, for it was his game to get the major to drink all he could.

And this time, too, the Frenchman took a goodly quantity, with the idea that the major would emulate his example.

The Kentuckian was evidently a man who believed that you couldn't get too much of a good thing, for he filled his tumbler half-full of the potent fluid.

Then the barkeeper was urged to join the party again, and complied.

After the glasses were emptied De Moroy declared that it was his turn to stand treat, and again the three drank.

Then the barkeeper declared that it was his turn to do the honors, and he would feel slighted if the gentlemen did not drink with him.

The pair were only too willing, and so the fourth round was put out of sight.

Then the Kentuckian exclaimed that they must have one more "h'ist," as he jocosely termed it, with him, as a parting night-cap.

The others assented, and again the three pledged each other.

When the glasses were empty the pair bid the barkeeper good-night, and departed.

After De Moroy got into the street his head began to swim, and his steps became uncertain.

But the major, although inclined to be very jolly, marched along apparently none the worse for the whisky.

The two were proceeding arm and arm, and the Frenchman soon came to the conclusion that if he had not been supported, and guided, by the powerful arm of his companion he could not have avoided reeling along in an extremely undignified way.

It was the old story of the trapper entrapped.

De Moroy had set out to get his companion drunk, failed completely in the attempt and got drunk himself.

But the Frenchman was one of those peculiar men whose brain always worked with tolerable clearness, no matter how much liquor he drank.

And so on the present occasion, although most decidedly intoxicated, yet he had sense enough to know what he was about.

His scheme was a total failure, and now the best thing for him to do was to get to bed as soon as possible.

So he told the major that he would put up at his hotel for the night.

In due time they arrived there.

The major got a room for his companion and gave one of the boys a quarter to see him safely to it, then went to his own, chuckling softly to himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TALE OF THE STRANGER.

THE two girls, the Serio-Comic and the skirt-dancer, walked home together.

The house where they had their rooms was only about eight minutes' walk from the theater, and for a couple of minutes the two walked on in silence, and then Florence said, abruptly:

"I have not as good an opinion of you as I once had!"

"Well, I am sorry to hear that," Rosamond replied, affecting to be surprised.

"What have I done that you do not like?"

"I do not like the way you behaved to-night."

"What do you mean?"

"In regard to this gentleman."

"Well, I am sure I behaved in a ladylike manner!"

"Oh, yes, but you suggested to him that he had better take a room at our house."

"Well, he will be comfortable there—will he not?"

"Yes, I presume so; but I do not think that you care much whether he will be comfortable or not."

"I don't know why you should say that! I am sure he is a very pleasant, agreeable gentleman; just the kind of a person whom one would like to oblige, you know."

"Ah, yes, but I am afraid that you want to get him in the house, so as to afford him an opportunity to become interested in you."

"Miss Sutherland thinks so, I am sure," the skirt-dancer continued. "For she gave you just a dreadful look when you told him about the room."

"Hard words break no bones, you know, and hard looks are even less dangerous," Rosamond replied, carelessly.

"Suppose I have taken a fancy to the man, what of it?"

"He is old enough to be your father."

"That doesn't make any difference as long as he has plenty of money, and is willing to marry me," the Serio-Comic declared.

"Ah, yes, but there is very little chance of a girl in our positions getting a man who occupies a good station, and has plenty of money, to marry us."

"Oh, I don't know about that!" Rosamond replied.

"Men when they become well advanced in years are apt to make fools of themselves, and it doesn't make any difference whether the man has any money or not."

"Rich men are just as apt to make fools of themselves as poor ones."

"Yes, that is true enough. But you do not know whether the man is married or single, but the chances are that he is married, and probably has children as old as you are."

"In that case I can't marry him, of course, for I wouldn't permit any man to commit bigamy for my sake!" Rosamond declared, emphatically.

"And you wouldn't make believe that you loved the man deeply, even when you knew there wasn't any chance of your marrying him just to rob him of his money?" the skirt-dancer exclaimed, in an indignant tone.

"Well, no, I don't think I am quite bad enough to do anything of that kind, although I am pretty badly off for money just now," the Serio-Comic observed, in a thoughtful way.

"Well, you are a long way from it now!"

tended to do something of the kind," Florence retorted.

"And I know very well, from the way in which Miss Sutherland looked at you, that she has an idea you want to try a game of that kind."

"I don't know why she should have such an opinion of me," Rosamond observed, slowly.

"She isn't the kind of woman to try a scheme of that kind, is she?"

"I don't honestly and truly believe that she would hesitate at much of anything short of murder, provided there was a good bit of money to be gained."

"You surprise me!"

"It is the truth!" Florence declared, stoutly. "And that is the reason why I do not have anything more to do with her than I can help."

"Yes, but what has led you to form this opinion?" the Serio-Comic asked.

"You surely wouldn't make such a grave charge against anybody without some foundation."

"Well, I will tell you; but mind, you must give me your word that you will not tell anybody about it, for I can't really prove anything, and I don't want to get into any trouble."

"Oh, you can rely upon my discretion!" the Serio-Comic declared.

"Whatever you may tell me I will be careful to keep to myself."

"Well, this little affair happened just after the Glorious Alcazar opened," Florence explained.

"Miss Sutherland was not in the company then, and there were two girls traveling together as sisters, although they were not related at all."

"Neither of them amounted to anything as performers, and although they looked well from the front of the house, yet near to they were horrid homely."

"I explain this so you will understand that when it came to the wine-room business neither of the sisters was in it with me, for, although a man might take a fancy to one of the girls on the stage, and think he would like to make her acquaintance, yet when he had a chance to look at her across a table and made the discovery that she was both ugly and ignorant, he didn't feel like buying wine for her."

"No, of course not!"

"Well, I think it was the fourth night of the first week that a well-dressed gentleman, who looked to be about forty years old, but who, after I became acquainted with him, I felt sure was much older, came into the wine-room."

"He apparently took quite a fancy to me, but I did not care for him for he was a hard drinker, and inclined to be boisterous when in liquor."

"I treated the man politely but discouraged his advances."

"Then, on the Sunday this Miss Sutherland joined the company, and after she saw this gentleman—Lee, he called himself, and said he was a Californian—but he wasn't, or if he had come from California he was an Englishman by birth, for his peculiar accent betrayed him. Well, as I was saying, after Miss Sutherland saw him buy a bottle of wine for me she inquired who he was, and when I said bluntly that I did not care for him and wished he would keep away from me, she volunteered to take him off my hands."

"She was kind," Rosamond remarked with a contemptuous smile.

"The man had plenty of money, apparently, and she was anxious to get it."

"It did not take her long to get on good terms with the stranger, and after three or four nights had passed, from the peculiar way in which she acted, hurrying up so as to leave the theater before I was ready, so that I would not come out with her and so could not see if she met any one, I had a suspicion that she had made an appointment with this Mr. Lee."

"Yes, it is strange how one will jump to a conclusion of that kind without anything to go upon, so to speak."

"Well, after that night I never saw Mr. Lee again, but I formed an opinion as to the reason of his absence, although, as you say, I hadn't any evidence to go upon."

"It was my belief that she had taken advantage of the fact that the man was drink-

ing heavily to decoy him to some place where he was robbed of his valuables, whether by her or by some one else, of course I don't know.

"Then, in the morning when he awoke and discovered how he had been treated he was afraid to kick up a row for fear the affair would get into the newspapers, and he would rather put up with the loss of his valuables than have the fact published that he had been made a fool of by a designing woman.

"Well, but what put this idea into your head?" the Serio-Comic asked.

"There must have been something!" she urged.

"Yes, there were a few trivial things," Florence replied.

"In the first place when three or four nights passed and Mr. Lee did not make his appearance, I happened to say in the dressing-room that I wondered what had become of him, whereupon she remarked:

"The man probably came to the end of his rope—that is, spent all his cash, and as Chicago is a poor place for a stranger without money, he had gone back home."

"Then in a week or so Miss Sutherland, who had dressed very poorly when she first came, suddenly blossomed out with new clothes and jewelry, and I should judge that she must have spent all the way from six hundred to a thousand dollars."

"That is quite a sum for a woman situated as she was to put into dresses and trinkets."

"Yes, I remarked to her one night, when she came out in a really elegant costume, that she was getting extravagant, buying so many new things."

"And what did she say?"

"Oh, these dresses are not new; I've had them a long time, but have never worn them much and so they look like new," but I knew it wasn't the truth."

"Was this Frenchman around at this time?" the Serio-Comic asked, carelessly.

"Oh, yes, he has been coming here ever since the first week."

"Well, Florence, you need not be afraid of my tying any game of that kind on this major. If he wants to spend money on me I shall not object, but he will not be robbed of a penny through me."

"I am glad to hear you say that, for I want to have a good opinion of you!"

Their arrival at their abode put an end to the conversation, but the Serio-Comic had secured food for thought.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MCCLANAHANS.

THE members of the theatrical trade are, as a rule, extremely late risers.

As they don't usually get to bed until about one in the morning, it is not strange that they seldom get up until nine or ten o'clock.

Rosamond Raymond was an exception to this rule, for she was always up at six, no matter whether she went to bed early or late.

On the morning which followed the night on which took place the events described in our last chapters, the Serio-Comic awoke just as the hands of the clocks pointed to six.

She got up and proceeded to dress herself—dress herself, in a various, curious way, too, and which would have excited the wonder of her chum, the skirt-dancer, if the latter could have witnessed the proceeding.

From her trunk the Serio-Comic took a well-worn suit of male attire.

First she put on a dark-colored lawn tennis shirt, then a pair of boy's stockings, and then the suit of clothes, with the exception of the coat.

And after she was dressed no one would have taken her for a woman for she looked exactly like a boy.

Then she put on her womanly attire over the boy's suit.

Her dress was made rather loose, so that it would fit over the suit.

Finally she donned her cloak, which was made to fit high in the neck, so as to conceal the boy's shirt, and put on her hat.

From the trunk she got a small cheese-cloth bag.

In this she packed the coat, which belonged to the suit, a round, soft hat and a short, dark brown-haired wig.

Then with some wrapping paper she ar-

ranged the bag so that it had the appearance of a parcel such as are sent out from the dry-goods stores.

After her preparations were completed she left the house and walked briskly down the street until she came to a cluster of World Fair hotels.

She selected the one which seemed to be best patronized of the lot, entered it, and engaged a room for a week, paying in advance, explaining that she had come on in advance of the rest of her folks, who had been detained by some important business just as they were about to start.

The clerk accepted the explanation readily enough, for she was evidently a respectable person, and had money to pay her bills, so a room was assigned to her.

As soon as she was domiciled in it, she unwrapped her bag, removed her womanly gear, which she packed in it, put on the coat, wig and hat, and so complete was the disguise that the keenest-eyed and smartest sleuth-hound would never have suspected, from her appearance, that she was not a boy.

Then she went from the room to the street.

As the hotel was full of strangers, who were coming and going all the time, there was little danger of any one troubling their heads about her.

After getting into the street, the Serio-Comic stepped into the first saloon she came to and bought a pint flask of whisky.

Then, taking a cable car, she rode downtown.

She got off at Fortieth street and went through to Michigan avenue, down which she proceeded for a few blocks until she came to a magnificent stone mansion, built after the style of one of the old-time feudal castles.

The grounds occupied nearly half an acre, with a stone stable in the rear, so elaborate that it seemed more like the private dwelling of a millionaire than the abode of beasts of burden.

The gate on the side street nearest to the stable was open, and the youth, as we shall now designate him so as to prevent confusion, marched up to the stable, where an old, gray-headed Irishman sat smoking a pipe.

"Good-morning, boss!" said the boy, taking off his hat and making a respectful bow.

"Is this the McClenahan place?"

"It is that same, sur," responded the Celt, pleasantly, for the politeness of the lad had made a favorable impression on him.

"And are you Mr. McClenahan?" asked the boy, with another respectful bow.

"Oh, no, me b'ye, you are away off there!" the other exclaimed feeling extremely flattered by being taken for the master of this magnificent abode.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for making the mistake, but perhaps you can tell me what I want to know if you are not the real boss."

"Faith! an' I will if I can!" the Irishman declared.

"I was looking for a job and I was told by the man in the saloon on Wabash avenue, where I last worked, that he heard one man say to another in the saloon that there was a chance for a good strong boy at the McClenahan place on Michigan avenue."

"The man wasn't after knowing what he was talking about!" the Irishman declared.

"There is no b'ye wanted here, although Hiven knows there is a plenty of wourk for wan, for there isn't wan hostler out of a hundred that would be after doing the wourk that I do in this place," the old man declared.

"And it is grumble I have to, but the young boss—that Leonard McClenahan—doesn't seem to think that I ought to have help, although Hiven knows, it is almost bruck my back sometimes is wid de wourk which is h'aped upon it."

"How many horses have you?"

"Siven, bedad! and only me to take the whole care of thim and luk after the carriages too."

"There's the coach-team, young Mr. Leonard's trotter, his saddle-hoss, and Miss Leonard's saddle-hoss, and her pair of ponies."

"Ah, it is bruck my back is with the wourk entirely."

"Who is it that has the say—the young boss as you call him?"

"Yis, all he has to do is to say the wourd and I could be after having a helper in a minute."

"I would work cheap for I need a job, although I have got a little money, for the saloon man paid me up to-day and gave me a flask of whisky besides."

The old Irishman pricked up his ears.

"A flask of whisky did ye say?" the Celt asked, and an eager look appeared in his small, pig-like eyes.

"Yes, extra good stuff, so the boss said, and I don't doubt it, for I never knew him to keep any bad liquor."

"I took the flask, for I thought that as long as he wanted to give it to me I might as well get all I could, although I am no drinker."

"Ye were right, me byel!" the Irishman declared with a wise shake of the head.

"Niver turn yer back on good whisky, or for that matter ye needn't be too particular whether it is good or bad," he continued, with a sly chuckle.

"Bekase if ye don't need it yourself ye are always likely to meet a friend who would not be after turning up his nose at a wee drop of the cr'ature."

"Do you care to take a drink?" the youth asked.

"You are quite welcome to it if you do."

"Well, it is not often that I am after drinking, but I wouldn't mind taking a drop, now, for it is mighty parched with thirst me throat is," the hostler replied with an air of indifference.

"Oh, you are quite welcome to take all you want," and the youth made a motion as if to take out the flask.

"Whist!" cried the Irishman, quickly, "don't be after pulling the bottle out here, for some one might see us, and then there would be the devil to pay."

"Yes, you are right, I didn't think of that," the young fellow observed.

"Ye see, me b'ye, it is all mighty soine and n'ate for the young boss to git as full as a goat on his champagne, and his Frinch wines, and if he comes home so staving drunk dat it takes two min to carry him up-stairs to his bed, it is a illigant joke, but if he caught me taking a wee sup of the cr'ature it is the grand bounce dat I would be after gitting."

"Oh, yes, that is true; it is all right for the master to get drunk and all wrong for the man."

"Hould on! here comes the young boss now!" the Irishman cried.

CHAPTER XX.

A LITTLE CHAFF.

THE young man was standing with his back to the house, so he had not noticed that two well-dressed gentlemen had come from the mansion and were advancing toward the stable.

"It is the young boss and a gentleman friend named Mackay," the Irishman explained.

"This same Mackay is a Californian and as rich as blazes; it's four or five goold-mines he do be after owning I'm tould."

"The dark one is Mackay, and he's a great chum of the boss."

"Young Mr. McClenahan is a h'ape of a sport, and for the last wake or so he's been after taking boxing-lessons, so he and the Californian come down to the stable and have a set to wid the gloves."

The youth laughed.

"Oh, he is a boxer is he?" he asked.

"Well, he is after thinking he is, do ye mind?" the Irishman replied with a wink.

"But though I niver set myself up to be much of a boxer, yet if I was tin years younger I will go bail that I could do him up in a dozen rounds, and not be after having to try very hard aither."

"I am glad that he is coming, for now I will be able to strike him for a job," the youth observed.

"Well, I don't want to be after discouraging ye, but it is my opinion that it is a mighty small chance ye stand of getting wourk out of him for that. He spends his money freely for all sorts of devilry, yet he is wan of the kind that is after grinding a poor man down to the last cent."

The two gentlemen came on slowly, conversing as they walked, so the youth had ample opportunity to examine them.

The young boss, as the Irishman termed Leonard McClenahan, seemed to be much the older of the pair, for his light hair was thickly streaked with gray, and his face seamed with many lines.

But when he came nearer it was plain that he was a "young old man."

The gray hairs and the lines were not due to age and cares, but to dissipation—the turning of night into day—the hot chase after pleasure regardless of the consequences.

The human must expect to pay dearly who attempts to follow the advice laid down in the ancient song:

"The very best way to lengthen our days
Is to take a few hours from the night, my boy."

His companion was the same man who had had the interview with the Texas comedian and whom Johnny Jimplecute addressed as James Richmond.

On that occasion he had been plainly—in fact, rather poorly dressed, but now he was resplendent in costly attire, and, to judge from his clothes, would have been taken to belong to that extremely limited class, who, thanks to the accident of birth, are not obliged to toil, and whose principal occupation consists of devising means to pass the time away.

"Good-morning to ye, surs," ejaculated the Irishman in the peculiar servile way common to men who have been kept under.

"Who is this fellow?" exclaimed McClenahan roughly, without taking any notice of the Irishman's greeting.

"He is afther a job, yer Honor," the hostler replied.

"I don't want anybody, so you can trot off as soon as you like," the young man declared.

"I am willing to work for almost nothing, sir," the youth urged, taking off his hat and making a very respectful bow.

"I am very handy about horses and carriages, and when I was at the hotel on Long Island in New York State, where John L. Sullivan trained for his fight with Corbett, I had the entire charge of the barn."

"Oh! were you at the place where Sullivan trained?" asked McClenahan, his interest excited.

"Yes, sir."

"You had a good chance then to see the great pugilist?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I had many a talk with him, for he isn't a man who puts on much style, although at that time he laid claim to being the champion of the world," the youth answered.

"And I have no doubt that you often put on the gloves with John L. and, possibly, gave him a few points in the manly art?" the young man remarked in a bantering tone.

"Oh, no, I never tried any game of that kind," the youth replied with a grave face, just as though he was not conscious that the other was making game of him.

"But I used to knock out the country gillies who came in to see the champion."

"They used to come for miles around and some of them had an idea that they knew something about boxing, but after they got on the gloves with me it didn't take many minutes for them to get sick of the game."

"Ah, you are a fighter, then?" McClenahan exclaimed in a jeering tone.

"Oh, no, I ain't much of a boxer but I was a heap sight better than the men who came up against me," the youth replied in a modest way.

"I say, Leonard, wouldn't it be a good idea for you to engage this young man to give you some lessons?" Mackay asked in a jeering way.

"Yes, I might be able to pick up a few points," McClenahan replied.

"Oh, well, I don't pretend to be much of a boxer," the youth demurred, "but I was always handy with my fists from the time I was a little kid, and so when I got a chance to see a man like the champion and his trainers put up their fists it was only natural that I should pick up a few tricks."

"Oh, yes, and I don't know as it would be quite safe for me to risk putting on the gloves

with an expert like yourself." McClenahan declared, taking a delight in chaffing the lad.

"Ah, the boot is on the other leg, I think!" the youth responded with a grin.

"You ought to be able to do me up without any trouble for you must be fully fifteen or twenty pounds heavier than I am, and that is a deal of weight to give away, still if you want me to put on the gloves with you I will."

CHAPTER XXI.

A BOXING-LESSON.

"REALLY, Leonard, I think you ought to try and see what this young man can do in the boxing line!" Mackay declared, pretending to be very serious.

"And if he shows that he knows anything about the manly art of self-defense, it might be a good thing for you to give him a job around the stable, so as to have him handy to practice with whenever you felt inclined to take a little exercise."

"I dare say that Mike here would be able to find work for him," the young man continued.

"Oh, yes, sir!" the Irishman responded with a grin.

"There's lashings of work in a stable like this," he continued.

"Of course I do the best I can, but a man can't be in two places at once, ye know."

"Oh, you fellows are always grumbling," McClenahan retorted.

"If I got this boy to help you it wouldn't be a week before both of you would be complaining that the work was too hard, and I ought to get another fellow."

"Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed the Irishman, with a very servile bow.

"Shure! two min would k'ape iverything up in the most illigant order!"

"Well, I will see about it," McClenahan observed.

"If this young man makes a good showing with the gloves, perhaps I may give him a trial," the young man observed, with a laugh.

"Oh, yes, it all depends upon that," Mackay remarked, winking at his friend as he spoke.

"If you can succeed in knocking Mr. McClenahan's head off you will stand a good chance of securing a job," he continued.

"Yes, but it is too much for you to expect that I can best a man who is fifteen or twenty pounds heavier than I am," the youth replied.

"If I can succeed in keeping him from knocking me out so as to be able to stay three or four rounds, I will be doing well," he argued.

"Come in the stable, and we will have a trial of your skill," McClenahan observed.

"What is your name, by the way?"

"Tommy King."

"If he is a king-pin boxer, the name is appropriate," the Californian remarked, with a laugh.

"Come on, and we will soon see what you are made of," McClenahan declared.

Then he led the way into the barn.

The young man had not the least idea that the youth would prove to be anything of a match for him, although in reality he was not fitted by nature to make much of a show in the pugilistic line.

It was true that he was fully twenty pounds heavier than the youth, but, as he was badly put together—as the saying is—the extra weight, being chiefly fat, was more of a disadvantage than otherwise.

Neither he nor the Californian possessed the power of being able to judge of a man's advantages in a contest of this kind from his appearance.

They had not the knowledge to enable them to detect that the youth was splendidly developed for a young fellow of his size, and from his build and proportions it was fair to presume that he possessed unusual strength and quickness.

"Bring out the gloves, Mike," McClenahan ordered.

The Irishman hastened to obey the command.

There was an open space in the rear of the stable, a sort of little yard used for exercising the horses, about thirty feet square, surrounded by a high fence, and a better place

for a couple of men to indulge in a little boxing match it would be hard to find.

McClenahan took off his coat and vest, then with a belt which the Irishman brought with the gloves, girded in his waist, removing his suspenders.

The youth followed his example.

"Now, Mackay, you must act as master of ceremonies," McClenahan said.

"Certainly! delighted to oblige!" the Californian replied.

"I will be time-keeper and referee combined."

"Three-minute rounds, eh?" he continued, taking out his watch.

"Yes," McClenahan replied.

"Well, are you all ready?"

"Let her go, Gallagher!" the young man answered.

"All right!" the youth exclaimed.

The two shook hands after the regulation fashion and then threw themselves in position.

Now, although Mackay was not much of a boxer himself, for he was not "built that way," yet he had seen a great many exhibitions, and the moment the youth put up his hands he perceived that he was no novice at this sort of thing.

And although he had been of the opinion that McClenahan "had a snap," to use the slang phrase, and would not have any trouble in getting away with his opponent, yet now that the two were "fiddling" away at each other, after the peculiar fashion common to the professors of the manly art, he could not help coming to the conclusion that if aught could be judged by appearances the youth was by far the best man of the two.

A few moments the two sparred, each one anxiously looking for an opening to get in a blow.

Then, suddenly, the right fist of King shot out, the blow aimed straight at the head of McClenahan, but the stroke was delivered in such a way that it was an easy matter for the young man to parry the attack, and he could not help smiling as he warded off the stroke.

The smile soon died away though, for the stroke was a feint.

By the parry McClenahan uncovered his body, and, with the regularity and almost the force, apparently, of the piston rod of a steam engine the left fist of the youth landed on the body of his opponent, just over the heart.

The force of the blow knocked McClenahan to a sitting posture, and for a moment or two he sat on the ground and stared at his antagonist.

His amazement was shared by the Californian and the Irishman.

It was as much as the latter could do to restrain himself, for he wanted to yell with delight, for he had all the love common to the men of his nature for a "pretty fight."

It would not do, though, to express satisfaction when his employer was getting the worst of the contest, and so by a powerful effort, he kept his mouth shut, rolling his head from side to side, with a well-assumed look of mortified astonishment upon it.

Slowly, McClenahan rose to his feet.

He did not exactly know what to make of it.

"Humph! you managed to get in a pretty good blow that time by accident," he remarked, in a rather sulky way.

It was a good stroke and no mistake.

During his boxing lessons McClenahan had received a few "rib roasters," but never one which seemed to land with the force and precision of this blow, which for a couple of moments completely took about all the wind out of him.

"Oh, no, that blow wasn't accidental," the youth responded.

"It was an old trick. I led for your head, and then when you uncovered yourself got home on the body."

"The body blows are not showy ones, and in an ordinary sparring bout they do not appear to amount to much, but when it comes to an actual fight, after a man gets twenty or thirty of those licks in his wind he is apt to feel mighty sore, and to be a little short of breath, and when a man gets winded in a game of this kind he might as well toss up the sponge."

Both of the young men looked at the youth

in astonishment for he seemed to understand just what he was talking about.

But McClenahan was not willing to believe that the boy could be a better boxer than himself.

It is a remarkable fact in this world that it often happens that a man is sometimes the very worst judge of his own abilities.

McClenahan was not cut out for a boxer, and had no talent in that line.

Again the opponents faced each other.

There was more sparring.

Again the youth led for the head.

McClenahan thought that he was going to try the same dodge again, so he looked out for his chest this time, but though the blow came, yet it was not intended to reach, and therefore McClenahan had no difficulty in parrying it.

But hardly had the smile of satisfaction appeared on his face, when, with lightning-like rapidity, the youth showered blows upon him.

He retreated under the fierce assault, became confused, and the youth, quick to improve every opportunity, put in a "right-hander" on the jaw, which again floored the young man.

The Irishman could not restrain himself this time.

"Oh, mushal did ye see that?" he exclaimed.

"This fellow is a fighter!" the Californian muttered, half aloud, half to himself.

This blow, although hard enough to bring McClenahan to the ground, did not knock the wind out of him so as to prevent him from immediately rising, as on the previous occasion.

He was thoroughly angry now, too, at being so roughly handled by an opponent that he had despised, and rose with the vague idea of attempting to gain an advantage by "rushing" his antagonist.

Acting on the idea he came at the youth after the fashion of a mad bull, but the other danced out of harm's way, ducking and dodging the "swings" which might have done some damage if they had only landed, but as McClenahan's strength was wasted on the empty air, his foe was not harmed, and soon Leonard's breath began to come thick and hard.

Finally he was compelled to pause, "bel-lows to mend," as the saying is, and then, with a straight right-hander the youth "nailed" McClenahan on the jaw, and as his chin went up the powerful left fist smote the young man again in the chest.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE VALET.

Down went McClenahan again, and this time he keeled over on his back.

"Three minutes!" exclaimed Mackay.

"Musha, musha! this little feller is the divil!" the Irishman exclaimed as he ran to McClenahan's assistance.

He assisted the young man to rise, and take a seat in the chair which Mackay brought, while King folded his arms across his chest, apparently none the worse for the exertions which he had made.

"Well, this fellow does know considerable about boxing," Mackay remarked.

"Oh, yes, and he is a wonderfully hard hitter too," McClenahan observed.

It was about all he could do to speak, being almost completely winded.

"From the showing that he has made I should say that he is a far better man than the fellow from whom you took lessons," the Californian remarked.

"Oh, yes, there isn't a doubt of it," McClenahan admitted.

"He may not be any better sparrer, but he is quicker in every way, and much harder to get at," he continued.

"It would be a good idea for you to drop your man and engage this young fellow to give you lessons," the Californian remarked in a bantering way.

"Well, I don't know about that," McClenahan remarked with a doubtful shake of the head.

"I don't think I could stand many lessons of the kind which he has given me to-day."

"I will be hanged if my ribs don't feel as if I had been hit with a hammer."

"You can take off your gloves, young fellow," he continued, addressing King.

"I am satisfied with the test that I have had of your abilities."

"You are a fighter from Fightersville, and it is my opinion that no one but a regular professional pugilist has any business to put on the gloves with you."

And while he spoke McClenahan removed the boxing-gloves.

The youth followed his example.

"Yes, I know I can more than hold my own with amateurs, for I have never met any one yet within twenty pounds of my weight who could stand me off."

"Of course, I played light with you to-day," he continued.

"For it was only a little friendly bout, and I did not want to go in to knock you out in dead earnest," the youth explained.

The gentlemen surveyed him for a moment in surprise, for it was their thought that the boy was now indulging in a little chaff.

But there wasn't the faintest trace of a smile on his face.

"I hope, sir, that you will see your way clear to give me a job," King said, after a pause.

"I need work badly, for I am a stranger here in Chicago, and don't know exactly which way to turn."

"Well, I don't really need anybody, but as you seem to be a pretty decent sort of a fellow, I am willing to give you shelter until you can get something to do," McClenahan said.

"I am very much obliged, sir!" exclaimed the youth, gratefully.

"There's a bed up in that little room in the stable, isn't there, Mike?" the young man asked.

"Yes, sur."

"You can show the young fellow where it is, and you can take him in to his meals with you, Mike," McClenahan said.

"All right, sur."

"And you can do what you can to help Mike," the young man observed, rising.

"Yes, sir, I will be glad to do all I can," the youth declared, with a low bow.

Then the gentlemen departed.

The Irishman and the youth went into the stable, helped themselves to chairs, and then as soon as the hostler felt sure that the pair were well out of ear-shot, he laughed loud and long.

"Oh, musha! it was as much as I could do to kape from crying out whin ye was slaughtering the boss!" Mike declared.

"Be the powers! it was a regular monkey that ye was afther making out of him!"

"Yes, he couldn't box even a little bit, and after he got the first poke in the wind he was done for."

"It was beautiful!" the Irishman declared. "And it was nearly choked I was thrying for to kape me mouth shut!"

"Pon me wourd, I niver wanted to let a yell out of me so badly in all me life!"

"I can sympathize with you, me boy!" exclaimed a dapper little man, with a decidedly English face, who emerged from the harness-room in the rear of the stable.

"Oho! is it there ye are, Wilkins?" the Irishman exclaimed, startled at first, but recovering his composure as soon as he saw who was the speaker.

The new-comer helped himself to a chair, and then grinned in a good natured way at the youth, who smiled in return.

"This is Mister Frederick Wilkins," said the Irishman. "Mister McClenahan's valet."

"Glad to meet you, sir," the youth declared, as he shook hands with the Englishman.

"The same to you, and I am very much obliged to you for the blooming way in which you knocked some sense into his nibs's head!" the valet exclaimed.

"And was ye afther seeing the beautiful exhibition?" the Irishman asked.

"Oh, yes, I came down 'ere to have a chat with you, for it is my day off, you know, and I arrived just in time to see you carry the gloves into the yard, so I knew something was hup."

Once in a while the Englishman took liberties with his h's.

"Then, thinking I would like to see the fun without his nibs catching onto me, I slipped into the harness-room, for I knew that from the window there I could get a view of the yard."

"And didn't this broth of a b'y knock the daylights out of him!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"It is a hard man the young boss is," Mike continued.

"He is not aisy to git on wid, and it is delighted I was to see him pounded, be-dad!"

"Ah, yes, he is very unreasonable once in a while," the valet assented.

"And I can tell you that I wouldn't stand his blooming nonsense if I didn't get mighty good pay," he added.

"But then, you see, a man ought not to expect much from a cove of his kind, for he is nothing but an hupstart."

"I tell you what it is, gents, there is all the difference in the world between a man what comes of a good, old family and one of these nobodies who comes from nothing."

"Oh, yes! Bedad! ye never said a truer wourd in your life!" the hostler declared.

"This cove's father was a pork-packer—made his money out of beastly pigs, and what can you expect from a bloke of that kind?" the valet demanded in contemptuous accents.

"No much, on yer life!" Mike exclaimed.

"Oh, by the way, I forgot the whisky!" said King abruptly, and he produced the flask as he spoke.

The hostler and the Englishman soon finished it, for the youth only took a single drink, explaining that whisky didn't agree with him, and he only drank brandy or ale.

"I'll take you to a place where you can get a good glass of ale!" the valet declared.

Mike couldn't go with the two on account of his duties and the pair set off together.

The spy was after information.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

"I DON'T mind standing treat, you know," the Englishman remarked as the two walked down the street.

"I really ought to blow you off in first-class style on account of the way you hammered his royal nibs," the valet continued with a chuckle.

"Oh, my! didn't you take the conceit out of him in short order, but he ought to have got it ten times worse."

"Well, you know, it wouldn't do for me to pound the boss too hard when I was after a job."

"Yes, that is so."

"Perhaps I made a mistake in allowing him to see that I could best him," the youth remarked, thoughtfully.

"If I had played 'possum, so as to make him think that he could beat me without any trouble I might have got work out of him."

"No, you wouldn't—not by a jugful!" the valet declared.

"He is one of the kind of men who likes to walk all over people."

"If he could have been able to work the trick he would have pounded you within an inch of your life, and then said that he hadn't any use for you, for you were no good."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"You worked the game all right, and got your bed and grub, if nothing more."

"Well, I will take it, of course, while I am keeping my eyes open for a good job; but I am not broke yet," King explained.

"I am not the kind of fellow who fools away his money."

"My last job was a paying one, and I put by a good bit of money, so I am able to take care of myself all right."

"Here's the place!" the valet exclaimed.

It was an English chop-house, kept by a burly Briton, who received the valet like an old acquaintance.

"I'll stand treat!" Wilkins exclaimed.

Then after the ale was drank the youth remarked that he felt hungry.

"Have you got a private room, where we can have a chop, and a little good brandy to wash it down?" King inquired.

"Certainly!" responded the landlord.

"Step right in here," he continued, opening a door at the back of the bar.

"Ere you will be as snug as a bug in a rug!" he declared.

"Oh, yes, this will do nicely," King remarked. "Give us a bottle of brandy—the best you have in the house, and a couple of bottles of soda."

"Brandy and soda, hey?" exclaimed the valet, smacking his lips.

"Well, young fellow, there is no denying that you know what is what!" Wilkins continued.

"I was in Canada for a year, and got used to that sort of thing," the other explained.

"We will sample the brandy while the chops are being cooked," King observed, as he followed the valet into the room.

The landlord hastened to bring the liquid refreshment, and then departed, closing the door behind him.

The Englishman was rather fond of liquor, and he had drank just about enough of the whisky to make him anxious for more stimulants.

The pair mixed a good, "stiff horn" of the brandy and soda and speedily disposed of it.

"Aha! that is the stuff!" the valet exclaimed. "They can talk about champagne all they like. It isn't in it with brandy and soda!"

"That is my opinion," the other assented. "Don't be afraid of it," he continued, as he refilled his glass.

"Oh, no; I am going to do it justice," the valet declared, as he took another liberal allowance of the brandy.

"This McClenahan, then, is a hard man to get along with?"

"Oh, yes; he is like all the rest of the hupstarts," the valet declared in a contemptuous tone.

The Englishman had drank enough liquor to make him inclined to be talkative.

"Let me see; old McClenahan died a year or so ago, didn't he?"

"About three years ago."

"And left a lot of money—two or three millions?"

"Not so much as that—about a million."

"And this young sport came in for it all, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; you are away out!" the valet replied. "The old buffer knew better than to leave all his cash to the son—there's a daughter, you know, Miss Leonora."

"There is, eh?"

"Oh, yes; and the old bloke divided his money equally between the two."

"You see, I have been with his nibs over a year, and a man like myself, who always keeps his ears open, generally succeeds in knowing as much about the family affairs of the people with whom he lives as they do themselves," he explained, with a sly chuckle.

"Oh, yes; of course a man of your style couldn't help getting posted."

"There isn't any mistake about that!"

"I suppose old McClenahan divided his money between his son and his daughter?"

"Yes, that was the way of it; and as he knew that this Leonard was inclined to make ducks and drakes of his cash, he tied up the most of his money so that he only has the interest and can't possibly get at the principal."

"Well, I think the old man was wise to fix the thing in that way."

"But how about the daughter?" King continued. "Is her money tied up too?"

"No, only until she is twenty-one."

The valet had been helping himself to the brandy very freely during the conversation, and the liquor made him incline to be talkative.

"As I told you, I know just about as much of the family affairs as though I was one of them," the valet declared.

"And I think the boss would be decidedly surprised if he knew that I had a suspicion in regard to a little game which he has been playing."

The manner of the Englishman was mysterious in the extreme as he made this announcement.

"Of course it would be a hard matter to keep a man like yourself in the dark."

"Ah, yes, and the boss is a regular chump too, as these Americans say!" Wilkins declared.

"He would have to be mighty smart to get ahead of a man like yourself," the youth responded with a knowing wink.

"Oh, yes!" the valet exclaimed.

"You can bet your life that I am up to snuff!"

"No doubt about that!"

"Now, if you will promise not to give this

away to any one I will let you into the secret of the little game which the boss has been playing," Wilkins remarked.

"Oh, you can trust me not to give the snap away!" the youth declared.

"In the first place, McClenahan is a red-hot gambler, and one of the unlucky kind too, who generally comes out a loser," the Englishman explained.

"Ah, yes, I see."

"He is also an extravagant rascal and really throws his money away."

"Of course, a man of that kind who not only spends his income before he gets it, but invariably spends more than he receives is always in debt and hard-pushed for money."

"And that is one of the reasons why he tries gambling, I suppose," King remarked.

"Yes, that seems to be an easy way for a man to make money, and since he has made the acquaintance of this rich Californian, Mackay, he has been going on worse than usual."

"Is he making a victim of the Californian?" King asked.

"Oh, no, Mackay is no fool, and I know from what I have heard McClenahan say that the Californian usually wins, but he lets the boss play on credit, and doesn't press him for payment when he loses."

"Oh, yes, I see, but the regular gamblers are not generally willing to do business in that way."

"With them it is usually cash on the nail," the youth remarked.

"Now, just at the present time, McClenahan is doing his best to make a match between his sister and Mackay."

"Does he think the Californian is a great catch, then?" King asked, pretending to be astonished. "I shouldn't think that he would, for when a girl has got as much money as Miss Leonora, it is not usually a difficult matter for her to get a first-class husband."

"There are wheels within wheels, my boy," the valet remarked, in a mysterious way, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, and glancing around as though he was afraid that some one would overhear him.

"I have my ideas in regard to the game which his royal nibs is trying to play—of course, you understand that I don't know for certain, but am only guessing at it."

"Certainly! I comprehend, but I would be willing to bet big money that a man as smart as you are will not be much out of the way."

The Englishman nodded his head with an air of wisdom and chuckled in a cunning way.

"You are right, me boy. I am up to snuff, and I can see as far into a millstone as the next man."

"I am one of the sort who keeps his eyes and ears open; the boss, too, is in the habit of getting so full once in a while that I have to put him to bed, and when he is thoroughly drunk he is a regular fool, so much so that sometimes he is inclined to talk about his private affairs."

"Is that so?" King asked with an appearance of great interest.

"Oh, yes; doesn't say much, you know, but just keeps matters to himself."

"Ah, but a man like you can easily put two and two together."

"You bet I can!" the Englishman cried, with a knowing wink.

"Now then, it is my idea that the boss has used some of his sister's money, without taking the trouble to ask her consent."

"Oh, are some of her funds handy so he can get at the cash?"

"Yes, stocks and bonds kept in a safe in the house, and it would not be a hard matter for McClenahan to get at the boodle."

"You see, Miss Annie McClenahan, the old pork packer's maiden sister, and the boss, and the girl's guardians, and as the old maid thinks that everything the boss does is all right, it would not be a hard matter for him to pull the wool over her eyes."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"Of course, I don't know how he has worked the trick, but I feel mighty sure that he has been up to some deviltry, and he is anxious to get a husband for his sister who will be inclined to let him off easy if the discovery is made that he has used the money."

"Well, if he and the Californian are great chums it would be all right."

The entrance of the waiter with the chops interrupted the conversation at this point.

The pair attacked the eatables and soon disposed of them, also finishing the brandy, then they departed.

As the spy had ascertained all he desired to learn from the valet, he made an excuse to leave him after they got into the street and hastened to the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HEIRESS.

"Affairs are progressing famously!" the spy declared, as he went on at a good pace toward the hotel where he had secured a room.

"This Englishman is a shrewd fellow, and I have no doubt that his suspicions are correct in regard to McClenahan."

"If he has used some of his sister's money without her knowledge, it would be natural for him to be afraid that if she married a man with whom he was not on good terms there might be a row kicked up in case his wrongdoing was discovered."

"Now I have found out why he should object to the heiress's marriage with Montgomery; but I do not know anything about the girl, and under the circumstances it is important that I should learn just what sort of a lady she is."

The spy meditated over the matter for a few moments.

"Well, I don't see as there is any better way for me to get at the truth than to take the liberty of making a personal call upon her."

"In a matter of this kind there isn't anything like taking the bull by the horns."

Acting on this idea when the spy reached the hotel, he proceeded to the room which he had secured, and resumed the womanly attire.

The youth vanished and Rosarond Raymond, the Serio-Comic, appeared.

"As I am a stranger, it may not be an easy matter for me to secure an interview with the young lady, but, as a rule, these American girls are not difficult to get at, although they may be worth a million or so," the Serio-Comic soliloquized as she proceeded on her way.

In due time she reached the McClenahan mansion, and when the maid servant answered her ring she asked to see Miss Leonora McClenahan.

"My name is Raymond," she explained. "But, as I am a stranger to her, the name does not matter."

"I wish to see her on some important business, and will only detain her for a few moments."

The servant hesitated, for it was only a couple of days ago that a pair of canvassers, one a book-seller, the other an agent for the sale of toilet articles, had succeeded in gaining admission to the young lady's presence by pretending that they wished to see her on some important personal business.

Miss Raymond guessed at once the thought that was in the mind of the other.

"Don't make any mistake about me," she said. "I haven't anything to sell; I am not a canvasser, and I really wish to see Miss Leonora upon an important business matter."

There was something in the Serio-Comic's manner which produced a favorable impression upon the girl.

So she ushered her into the parlor, and said she would take the message to the young lady.

The apartment was magnificently furnished, and as the Serio-Comic looked around, the thought came to her that the old pork-packer had not grudged the spending of money when he fitted up his mansion.

In a few minutes the heiress made her appearance.

Leonora McClenahan was a handsome, stylish girl with well proportioned figure.

She was about the medium size, had regular features, with big, blue eyes and a wealth of dark brown hair.

But the experienced eyes of the spy used to the study of mankind, detected that there was a lack of firmness in the face.

The chin was rather weak, and Raymond decided at once that in a critical situation

the chances were great that the girl would be found wanting in resolution.

"Allow me to have the pleasure of introducing myself," the Serio-Comic remarked in her smoothest and softest tone.

"My name is Rosamond Raymond and I am an actress."

The heiress gave a slight start, and it was apparent that she was surprised.

"I have come to see you in regard to Mr. Montgomery," the Serio-Comic continued in a low tone, for the parlor-door was open, and there was the chance that there might be some one within earshot in the entry.

"Would it not be wise to close the door, so that we can speak freely without danger of being overheard?" Rosamond continued.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Leonora nodded assent; then, going to the door, she first glanced into the entry, in order to see whether any one was near.

The hall was deserted.

"No one is about," she said, "so you can speak freely," she remarked, as she closed the door.

"Pray be seated."

"Thank you."

The Serio-Comic resumed the seat from which she had risen upon the approach of the young lady.

"Now, Miss McClenahan, I am going to be very frank and straightforward with you about this matter," Rosamond remarked.

"Mr. Montgomery is an old friend of mine—not my admirer or lover, for there has never been anything of that sort between us.

"We were like brother and sister, and I am free to confess that if he had been my own brother in reality I could not think more of him than I do, for he is a noble fellow."

The girl smiled, for her lover's praise was sweet to her ears.

"In a moment of confidence he told me all about you, having faith, I presume, that my woman's wit would succeed in finding some way to remove the obstacles which are in the way of your union to him."

The heiress blushed a little and cast down her eyes.

"Alas! I fear that it is a difficult task which you have undertaken," Leonora remarked.

"Obstacles vanish when boldly they are confronted," as the poet says," Rosamond declared.

"Now, then, if I comprehend the situation rightly, you are of the opinion that your brother and aunt will not be willing to agree to your marriage with Mr. Montgomery, and you are reluctant to marry without their consent?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"I have taken some pains to get all the particulars that I could obtain in regard to your family," the Serio-Comic said.

"I know that it is not nice to play the spy in this way," she added.

"But as the happiness of my friend was at stake I did not hesitate, and according to the information which I have gained it is your brother who alone stands in the way, for if he gives his consent your aunt will not refuse hers if he requests her to agree, so great is the influence he possesses over the lady."

"Well—yes, I think that is correct," Leonora admitted, much surprised that this stranger should understand the situation so well.

"If your brother's consent could be gained would you be willing to marry Mr. Montgomery?" the Serio-Comic asked.

The girl hesitated to reply, apparently much embarrassed.

"You must excuse me for putting the question so abruptly," Rosamond remarked.

"But this is one of the cases where it is necessary to come directly to the point."

"I am afraid that my brother would not consent, for he seems to have set his heart on my marrying a friend of his, and I must admit that I am afraid of him when he becomes angry."

"You refer to this Californian, Mackay?"

"Yes, but how did you know anything about it?" asked Leonora in surprise.

"I told you that I had acquainted myself with all the particulars that I could possibly acquire," the Serio-Comic replied with a smile.

"Now then, I think I can arrange this matter if you are willing to make a pecuniary sacrifice for the sake of marrying Mr. Montgomery."

"Yes, I would gladly do so," the girl exclaimed.

"Your brother is greatly in need of money, and I do not doubt that if you were willing to give up a good round sum, say a hundred thousand dollars, to him that his consent could be gained."

"A hundred thousand dollars, of course, is a fortune, but large as is the sum, you can spare it and never miss the money."

"Oh, yes, that is true. Why, I do not begin to spend my income now, for I am not at all inclined to be extravagant," the girl remarked.

"If you are willing to make this sacrifice, I do not think there is a doubt but what the consent of your brother can be obtained," Rosamond observed.

"It will take some little time, for the matter must be handled in a very careful manner," the Serio-Comic continued.

"Oh, yes, I understand that, and I feel sure that the task will prove to be much more difficult than you anticipate, for my brother is very stubborn and inclined to be extremely violent if any one attempts to act contrary to his wishes," Leonora assented.

"I think I can get him to listen to reason, as I have an extremely persuasive way with me sometimes," the Serio-Comic remarked with a quiet smile, as she rose to depart.

"Well, I sincerely hope so!" the girl declared.

"You must be careful to act so that your brother will not have any suspicion that you know aught of the matter," Rosamond warned.

"Yes, yes; I will be on my guard!"

And then the spy took her departure.

"I think I can arrange this affair all right," Rosamond murmured after getting into the street. "And it will not be very difficult, either."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE APPOINTMENT.

WHEN Rosamond arrived at her lodgings, she found the Texas comedian awaiting her, but the change which had taken place in Johnny Jimplecute's appearance was so great that the Serio-Comic did not recognize her visitor until she got a view of his face.

The comedian had on a new suit of clothes, with a gay flannel outing shirt, a new soft hat, Alpine style, and even a new pair of shoes.

"Well, well, this is a transformation!" Rosamond exclaimed.

"You are right, me noble dook! 'Richard is himself ag'in!'" the comedian spouted.

"How is it? Why, you are a regular dude!" the Serio-Comic declared.

"Struck an angel!" Jimplecute declared.

"That was lucky!"

"Oh, yes, oh, I tell ye, me royal lord, this hyer Chicago is about as near heaven as we kin git on this earth!"

"Do you think so?"

"Well, it is, jest about this hyer time, 'cos thar are so many angels wandering round."

"But that is all on account of the Fair, I s'pose. Mebbe if it wasn't for the Fair drawing the galoots from the four quarters of the globe, the Windy City would be a hard place for a child of genius like myself to pick up a living."

"I should not be surprised; but, as it is, the strangers here have got money, and as they came to Chicago expressly to have a good time, they don't mind spending their cash," Rosamond observed.

"That is it! you have got it down fine!" the Texan declared.

"Now this hyer man that I picked up last night was an angel in disguise," he explained, "for at the time that I took him in tow I didn't expect to make a red out of him."

"Is that so?"

"Correct, me noble dook!" declared the comedian, with a dignified wave of his fat hand.

"He was a middle aged cuss, well dressed, and sporting a handsome watch-chain; he was sitting in a doorway on Wabash avenue, near Twentieth street, last night, when I spied him."

"I saw at the first glance that he had a

big load on board, and I sed to myself, sed I, the first crook w'ot comes along will go through you and win all your valuables."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that!"

"Then I sed to myself, sed I, Jimplecute, you noble-hearted cuss, hyer is a chance for you to play the good Samaritan and make a hit in the character."

"So I pulls in alongside of the galoot. He had one of those queer jags on, you know, he could talk all night, but was awful unsteady on his legs."

"He was from lower Illinois, had his ticket for home, and calculated to take the night Express, but owing to the seductions of the flesh-pots of Egypt, in the shape of Chicago whisky, had fallen by the wayside."

"I offered to get a hack and put him on board of his train as thar was time to catch it; he was glad of the chance and I did the job to the queen's taste."

"Then arter I got him into his car he took a crumpled bill out of his pocket and gave it to me for my trouble."

"I had to run, for the train was starting, without having a chance to look at the money, and when I did gaze upon it you might have knocked me down with a feather for the old galoot had given me a hundred dollar note."

"Well, well, that was a windfall!"

"You bet!" the comedian declared with great gusto.

"I s'pose the old Roman made a mistake, mebbe thought that it was a dollar, but I didn't consider that I ought to chase him clear down to southern Illinois to correct the mistake."

"Certainly not!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed.

"If you hadn't taken care of him the chances are a thousand to one that some crooks would have got hold of him and robbed the man of everything he possessed."

"It is a long time since I had a hundred 'cases' all at once in my clothes, and so I thought I had better salt down a few of the ducats in some new harness, hence this gorgeous array."

"You were wise."

"But now to business!" the comedian exclaimed briskly.

"I communicated with that party who wants a certain job done, and he would like to see the man who is willing to try the game at nine o'clock to-night at the corner of State and Polk streets."

"Yes, I know where that is."

"He will be dressed in dark clothes, with a dark brown slouch hat, and hold a letter in his hand."

"Which corner?"

"The upper one, on the left-hand side of State street."

"All right, I will warn my man."

Then after a few more unimportant words the comedian departed.

And as he went out of the parlor, Imogene Sutherland made her appearance.

"Now, Miss Raymond, I want to talk business with you!" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VOCALIST SHOWS HER HAND.

A LOOK of surprise appeared on Rosamond's face.

"You want to talk business with me?" she asked.

"Yes, that is just what I want to do!"

"Well, it is all right, I suppose, although I confess I do not understand what you are driving at."

Rosamond had seated herself in an easy-chair during her interview with the comedian, and had not risen at Miss Sutherland's entrance.

"It will not take me long to explain," the other remarked, and then she came to where the Serio-Comic sat and, lowering her voice, asked:

"Has that old Kentucky gentleman taken a room here?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Well, it is about him that I wish to speak," she remarked in a low and cautious tone.

"Go ahead!"

"But this is no place for a private conference," Miss Sutherland observed.

"Can't we go in your room so as to be able to speak freely?"

"Yes, if you like; my room is yonder," and the Serio-Comic nodded to the door at the end of the apartment as she rose from her chair.

"As I told you in the beginning, I have come to talk business, and I do not want my words to be overheard."

"In my room you can speak freely, and there isn't any danger that any one will play the eavesdropper, for this is an old-fashioned house built before the days of shoddy, and flimsy buildings, with good, solid walls," the Serio-Comic remarked as she led the way into her room.

"Help yourself to a chair," she continued, after she closed the door behind her visitor.

Miss Sutherland seated herself in a rocking-chair, took a careful survey of the apartment, as if she wanted to be sure that she could speak without danger of her words being overheard—Rosamond had seated herself meanwhile—and then she said:

"Do you intend to try any little game with this Kentuckian?"

"Why, what a question to ask!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed, with laugh.

"You need not answer it, of course, if you do not wish to," Miss Sutherland said slowly.

"And I suppose you think that I am troubling myself about a matter which does not concern me."

"Well, I think you are a little inclined to be inquisitive."

"I thought you had some little game in your mind when you recommended the old gentleman to get a room in the same house where you stop; still, I may be wrong in my surmise, and so I thought it would not do any harm for me to ask you about the matter."

"Oh, no; no harm, and I don't mind answering the question."

"The old gentleman isn't anything to me, and I do not intend to try any game with him."

"In regard to the room, I spoke on the impulse of the moment, not with the idea of getting the major in the same house with me for any particular purpose."

"Now, Raymond, I am going to be frank with you, for you are a woman of the world, and I judge that you are not one of the kind to give way to any silly, sentimental nonsense, like that Florence Valentine, for instance."

"Well, I certainly have had hard knocks enough in my career through life to take the nonsense out of me!" the Serio-Comic declared, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"I judge that this major is a very wealthy man."

"He certainly seems to have that appearance."

"My idea is that such men are fair game for women situated as we are!" Miss Sutherland declared.

"A wealthy man of this kind can spare a few thousand dollars and never feel the loss of the money."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that."

"And the money would do me a world of good just now."

"Well, money is always handy, you know," the Serio-Comic responded, with a smile.

"Will you go in with me to try and get some out of the old guy?"

"How can the game be worked?" the Serio-Comic asked.

"Oh, you are very innocent all of a sudden!" the other exclaimed.

"Well, I don't pretend to be particularly smart about a thing of this kind," Rosamond responded.

"Of course, I know that if I could succeed in entrapping the old man into a marriage, I would be able to get at his money," she continued, in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, that would do."

"But then, there isn't any certainty that I could get the major to marry me," the Serio-Comic urged.

"Well, I don't think there would be much trouble in regard to that, for the old gentleman has reached that age when he is prepared to be made a fool of by almost any good looking woman who comes along."

"I watched him closely when he was talk-

ing with you in the wine-room, and I could see that he was favorably impressed by your appearance and manners."

"Yes, he was good-natured and polite enough, but then he had been drinking pretty freely, I think, and some men are inclined to be very sociable when they are in liquor."

"That is true enough, but apart from that I think the man has taken a fancy to you," Miss Sutherland declared.

"It may be true, of course," Rosamond observed in a way which showed that she had considerable doubts about the matter.

"But I never take much stock in what a man says when he has been drinking."

"Well, there is an old saying, you know, that there is no fool like an old fool."

"That is true enough!" the Serio-Comic assented with a laugh.

"And from the fact that when you suggested to him that he could probably get a room in the same house with you he seemed to be very favorably impressed with the idea, I at once came to the conclusion that you could make a conquest of the man if you felt inclined that way."

"Perhaps you are correct in your assumption, but then you are not sure whether the man is free to get married or not; he may be married already, you know."

"Oh, I have not neglected to take that fact into consideration," the other replied, immediately.

"But even supposing that he is a married man, the chances are great that if he made up his mind to have a flirtation with you, he would not admit he was not a free man."

"A great many men, you know, are inclined to play the rascal in an affair of this kind, and it is my opinion, that it is only right for a woman to make all she can out of a man who deliberately sets to work to make a fool of her."

"Yes, if a man is mean enough to try a game of that kind he ought to be made to pay dearly for it."

"That is just the way I look at the matter, and so I think this old major is fair game."

"I do not doubt he is a very rich man," Miss Sutherland continued.

"He certainly acted like a man who had plenty of money, but then you cannot always tell by that, you know," Rosamond remarked.

"There are some men who like to put on style and go on as if they were very wealthy when they are away from home, and in reality they do not amount to anything."

"Yes, yes; I know that, but I can assure you, Raymond, that I have seen too much of the world to be deceived in a case of this kind!" the other exclaimed, a little impatiently.

"You think, then, it is certain that this man has lots of money?"

"There isn't a doubt in my mind!" Miss Sutherland exclaimed.

"And if the game is played in the right way, there is a chance of getting five or six thousand dollars out of him."

"Why, that is a small fortune!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed.

"That isn't anything!" the other exclaimed. "I have known a man of this kind to give up from ten to twenty thousand dollars before he was cured of his infatuation."

"Oh, yes, I suppose such a thing does happen once in awhile," the Serio-Comic remarked thoughtfully.

"The first point is to ascertain whether the man has got any money or not," Miss Sutherland explained.

"If he has the cash, there isn't a doubt but what we can get a good big sum if we try hard for it."

"Now, then, as the man seems to have taken a fancy to you, there is no doubt in my mind that you can make a big strike if you are willing to make an effort."

"Yes; but even if he is not married, perhaps I am not free, you know," the Serio-Comic remarked, in a doubtful way.

"Bah! it doesn't matter if you have a husband as long as he is not near at hand to interfere in the game!" Miss Sutherland declared.

"If I were you, and made the discovery that the easiest way to get at the old man's cash was by marrying him, I should not hesitate to do it if I had a dozen husbands!"

"Of course, it all depends upon how one

is situated," Rosamond remarked, with a grave shake of the head.

"Now, as far as I am concerned, I would not dare to get married, even if I stood a chance to win a great stake, for there is a certain party who would be sure to find it out, and then this party would do their best to make it particularly warm and disagreeable for me."

"Yes, I understand; but, if I were you, I should not let anything of that kind worry me, for, if a woman is at all smart, she can generally get out of such scrapes, for the law is usually very uncertain where a woman is concerned."

"Oh, it isn't the law that I fear, but personal vengeance."

"Ah, that is another matter, and you are right in being cautious, but if you do not care to go into this game, try your best to turn the man over to me, and if I make any money out of him, I will do the fair thing by you."

"Well, I certainly haven't any objection to making a little money!" Rosamond declared.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WEALTH GALORE.

"THERE is where you are wise!" Miss Sutherland exclaimed, with an approving nod.

At this point a knock at the door interrupted the conversation.

It was the maid-servant.

"The major has just gone up to his room," she said. "And he would like to see you for a few minutes in the parlor when he comes down, Miss Raymond."

"Certainly! have the kindness to tell him that he will find me there when he returns," the Serio-Comic replied.

The girl departed.

"Didn't I tell you that you had made a decided impression on the man?" Miss Sutherland exclaimed.

"Well, yes, I must admit that it really looks as if he had taken a fancy to me," the Serio-Comic responded.

"You can make five or ten thousand dollars out of him if you play your cards right!" the other declared.

"That is a large amount of money," Rosamond observed, in a doubting way.

"Of course, you will have to run some risk, but you cannot expect to win a stake like that without going to some trouble, and possibly incurring a little danger."

"I am afraid that I haven't got the courage to make the attempt," the Serio-Comic urged.

"Do your best to turn the man over to me, then, and if the game can't be worked in that way, then let me tell you how to go ahead, and you can take my word for it that if the man has got money—and I don't think there is any doubt of it—you will be able to get a handsome sum," Miss Sutherland remarked.

"Well, I will see, but if there is any danger to be run, I think I would rather turn the man over to you, for I am inclined to bet a little chicken-hearted."

"Oh, you have got pluck enough, I think, if you screw your courage up to the sticking point; but let us go into the parlor, so as to be ready to receive the gentleman."

The two proceeded to the parlor and seated themselves.

Hardly had they occupied the chairs when Major Magoffin made his appearance.

"Ah, Miss Sutherland, this is an unexpected pleasure!" the old gentleman declared with a gallant bow.

"I expected to see only one fair lady, and lo, and behold! mine eyes are delighted by the sight of two, be glad!"

"Ah, major, you are a sad flatterer, I am afraid!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, not a doubt about it, but I believe all you Kentucky gentlemen are built that way," Miss Sutherland added.

"No, no, a Kentuckian never speaks anything but the truth when he addresses his conversation to ladies!" the major declared with another gallant bow.

"I took the liberty, Miss Raymond, to ask you to step into the parlor, because just about this time of day I get thirsty, and as I came in I ordered a bottle of wine from the saloon on the corner, and a true Ken-

tucky gentleman never drinks alone, ladies, if it is possible for him to procure company.

"I had no idea though that I would be honored by the presence of two charming creatures instead of one."

"Perhaps though you are inclined to exclaim in the words of the old song, 'How happy I could be with either if t'other dear charmer were away!'" Miss Sutherland remarked with a merry laugh.

"Oh, no, you wrong me!" the old gentleman declared with another elaborate bow.

"I am a firm believer in the old adage, 'The more the merrier,' as far as lovely women are concerned," he continued.

Then there came a ring at the door.

"That is the wine, I presume," the Kentuckian remarked.

The maid-servant conducted the waiter with the wine to the parlor, and the major, in order to pay the man, pulled out a roll of bills as big as his fist.

Miss Sutherland cast a meaning glance at the Serio-Comic when she caught sight of the money, as much as to ask whether she noticed the display of wealth.

Then after the servant and the waiter departed, as the major began to fill out the wine, Miss Sutherland said:

"Oh, by the way, major, can you change a ten-dollar bill for me," and she drew out her pocketbook as she spoke.

"Really, Miss Sutherland, I am afraid that I cannot oblige you," the Kentuckian responded again producing the roll of bills.

"I may be able to give you two fives for it, but that is the best I can do, for I haven't any ones or twos."

"The bills are all of large denominations," he explained as he examined the roll.

"If it was a fifty, or a hundred, or a thousand, I would be able to accommodate you."

"Why, major, you don't really mean to say that there is a thousand dollars there?" Miss Sutherland exclaimed, pretending to be greatly amazed.

"Oh, yes, nearer fifteen hundred than a thousand," the old gentleman replied in a matter-of-fact way.

"But I should think you would be afraid to carry so much money around with you!" Miss Sutherland exclaimed.

"Afraid? why, my dear Miss Sutherland, why should I be afraid?"

"For fear that you might lose it, or be robbed, or something of that sort," the girl responded.

"Oh, no, no!" the major declared with a jolly laugh.

"Not the least danger of anything of that kind happening to me, I assure you," he continued.

"I never lost any money, or was robbed in my life, and yet for years I have always made a practice of carrying large sums of money with me, never less than a thousand or two of dollars."

"You see, my dear ladies, I am considerable of a speculator, and as I always have the ready cash with me I am often able to take advantage of favorable opportunities to pick up bargains."

"Oh, yes, I understand," Miss Sutherland remarked.

"I am sorry, but I can't even give you two fives," the major remarked as he completed the examination of his money.

"But after we finish the wine I will go out and get change for you."

"Oh, I couldn't think of troubling you!" the vocalist declared.

"No trouble at all!" the major responded in his gallant way.

"But we are neglecting the wine," he continued. "Here is wishing you all possible success!" And he pledged the ladies with courtly grace.

"Aha! that is fine stuff!" the old gentleman declared after he had emptied his glass.

"The boss of the corner saloon declared that he kept as good wine as could be had in Chicago, and I fancy that the statement is not very far from the truth."

"But allow me to refill your glasses, ladies," and he hastened to do so.

"If this bottle isn't enough there are plenty more where this came from, you know."

The girls laughed, and Miss Raymond said:

"This one will do, I think. We are not going to allow you to throw away your money on us."

"Ah, now, you must not talk that way, for it is really a pleasure for me to be allowed to contribute to your comfort or happiness!"

"It might be an altogether different sort of matter if I could not afford it," the old gentleman continued.

"But, luckily, I can. I have been very fortunate lately in my speculations, and I am negotiating a deal now which, if it goes through all right, will net me a fortune."

"It will take about ten thousand dollars for me to swing the matter through, and I have this morning received a notification that that sum is in the First National Bank hyer subject to my order."

There was a peculiar glitter in Miss Sutherland's eyes as she listened to the major's words which did not escape the attention of the Serio-Comic, although apparently she was not paying any attention to her companion.

Then the girls took the wine which the major handed them, and the old gentleman again wished them all possible success.

"By the way, I am going to take a little drive this afternoon," the major remarked.

"I am told there are some very handsome places along the lake which are well worth seeing, and if you ladies have no other engagements, I shall be pleased to have you accompany me."

"You will have to excuse me, major, for I am obliged to go down-town," Rosamond remarked.

"But you haven't any engagement, have you, dear?" she continued, to Miss Sutherland.

"No, and I shall be delighted to go!" the vocalist declared, promptly.

"We will finish the wine, and then I will go for the carriage," the Kentuckian observed.

It did not take the three long to empty the bottle, and then the major departed.

"I am very much obliged to you for giving me the chance," Miss Sutherland declared.

"And if I succeed in winning a stake, I will not forget your share."

"Be sure you don't!" the Serio-Comic responded.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NEW DISGUISE.

AFTER the pair departed Rosamond fell to speculating upon the work which was before her.

"One thing is certain, and that is I will not be able to appear at the Glorious Alcazar to-night," she murmured.

"And I suppose that the quicker I notify the stage-manager the better."

Acting on the idea she put on her hat and preceded to the theater.

As she anticipated she found the old actor in the saloon, and when she announced that she had some important business which would prevent her from appearing on that evening he was annoyed.

"The main guy will not like it, you know!"

"I can't help it whether he does or not!" the girl replied. "I have got to attend to this business, and that is all there is to it."

"It will cost you a couple of bones, sure!" the stage-manager declared.

"The old Dutchman will be certain to forfeit you two dollars if you miss your turns to-night."

"I can't be here if it costs me the whole week's salary!" the Serio-Comic replied.

"All right, if it has got to be that way, and I will do the best I can to make the old man go light on you," the veteran actor added.

"Thanks! I am very much obliged, and I will do as much for you."

"Don't mention it!" the stage-manager exclaimed with an air of great dignity.

Then Rosamond returned to her abode.

"As there is no telling what the night will bring forth I may as well take a good long nap, so as to be fresh and in readiness for whatever work may come," she murmured when she was ensconced in her apartment again.

Acting on this idea she removed her outer garments, reclined upon the bed and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

The hands of the clock upon the mantel-piece pointed to the hour of five when she awoke.

"It is about time for the major and Miss Sutherland to return," the Serio-Comic observed as she bathed her face, then put on a loose wrapper.

"Possibly, though, she may not come back here," Rosamond murmured as she opened the door leading into the parlor.

And as she did so Miss Sutherland made her appearance in the room.

"I have just got back," she said.

"Where is the major?"

"He has gone to the stable with the carriage," the vocalist explained.

"I've had a splendid time," she continued. "The old gentleman is most excellent company, but I am afraid that there isn't much chance to make any money to amount to anything out of him."

"Is that a fact?"

"I think so, but of course I cannot tell for certain just yet, for I am not sufficiently well acquainted with the man."

"Yes, but I think a woman gifted with your excellent judgment would not be apt to be led to a false conclusion in a case of this kind."

"Well, I agree with you in regard to that, but I never like to be too dogmatic."

"You see the major is a widower—in fact a three times widower, for he has had three wives, and so what he doesn't know about women isn't worth knowing," the vocalist explained, with a laugh.

"Yes, yes; a man with such experience must be well posted."

"And he told me, with a great deal of satisfaction, that each one of his wives brought him a fortune."

"A lucky man!"

"And he said, in a joking way, that he would not mind getting married again, provided he happened to meet with a good-looking woman who was worth fifty or a hundred thousand dollars."

"Well, that let us out!"

"Yes, and the man meant what he said, too; I could tell that from his manner, and as I said in the first place, I do not think there is a chance for us to make anything."

"He seemed to be such an easy-going, good-natured gentleman that I was inclined to think a smart woman might get him infatuated, if she played her game in a skillful manner."

"I don't think there is a chance, my dear!" Miss Sutherland exclaimed, decidedly.

"In a few words I can tell you just what sort of a man he is," she continued.

"A jolly fellow, fond of a good time, who enjoys himself in the society of such girls as we are, who do not stand upon ceremony, and when it comes to spending ten or twenty dollars to entertain us, he would not hesitate for a moment; but if one were to attempt to coax two or three hundred ducats out of him, he would take the alarm immediately."

"Yes, I understand; he is willing to pay liberally in order to have a good time, but would not allow any woman to make a fool of him."

"Exactly! you have got it right!"

"Well, I must be off!" Miss Sutherland continued.

"I thought I would drop in and let you know how the land lies, so you wouldn't make any mistake."

"I'm ever so much obliged, I am sure!" the Serio-Comic declared, as her visitor departed.

But when she was gone Rosamond indulged in a scornful laugh.

"Oho! smart as you are you will not pull the wool over my eyes, as you will no doubt discover, to your disgust, before you are many weeks older."

"Now I will get my supper and then shut myself up in my room, so the folk in the house will think I have gone to the Music Hall, as usual, then watch my opportunity to steal out."

And this plan Rosamond carried out without any trouble.

But it was not in her own proper person that she left the house.

She was disguised as an Italian—a man—and I repeat indeed was the assumption.

Her hands and face were stained a dark brown; a jet black wig hid her own locks; and she was dressed in a well-worn black velvet suit, with a rusty, brown soft hat pulled down over her brows.

"Matteo Bosso will do for a name!" she muttered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE STRANGER

THE Italian—as we shall now term the spy so as to prevent confusion—took a downtown car and at a quarter to nine arrived at the corner of State and Polk streets.

At nine of the night this particular neighborhood is a densely populated one.

There are lots of people passing up and down, and plenty of loungers on the corners, so that two people could readily meet by appointment without being likely to attract any observation.

It is an extremely miscellaneous lot of people too who are to be met with in this particular locality at the time of night of which we write; about as many blacks as whites, with a good number of Italians and other foreigners, so no one took any notice of the spy.

The Italian had come down on the east side of the street, and came to a halt at a convenient point for him to watch the opposite corner.

"He will probably arrive a few minutes ahead of time," the spy murmured, communing with himself.

"So I will be able to see what the man is like before I have any talk with him."

There was already a half-a-dozen men lounging on the corner, but none of them appeared to the careful eyes of the spy to answer to the description of the man whom he had come to meet.

"My man will be apt to be on the lookout, for he will expect me to make my appearance at any moment, but none of those fellows appear to take any interest in the passers-by."

"Then, too, he will have a letter in his hand as a signal, and none of them have anything of that sort," the spy soliloquized.

Then the watcher got his eyes on a man coming up State street at a slow pace, a medium-sized fellow, dressed in a well-worn dark suit, with a brown soft hat pulled down over his brows.

He wore a full, short, black beard so that but little of his face was visible, but what could be seen appeared to be of a swarthy hue.

"I should not be surprised if that should turn out to be my man," the spy muttered.

There was something about the man which appeared suspicious to the well-trained eyes of the sleuth-hound.

"It strikes me that he is in disguise," he muttered.

"Both hair and beard are probably false, and he has stained his skin."

"A dodge of that kind will work all right at night, when it would not pass muster by daylight at all."

When the man reached the lower corner of Polk street he halted, and appeared to be carefully surveying the people on the upper corner.

"He is speculating, no doubt, which one of the gang is the man whom he has come to meet," the spy murmured.

"So it is about time that I got a move on and went over," he continued.

Acting on this idea, the Italian crossed to the upper corner of Polk and State street, and as he arrived on the corner the bearded stranger crossed Polk street, then as he stepped from the gutter to the sidewalk, drew a letter out of his pocket.

It was the signal agreed upon.

The spy had not made a mistake in picking out his man.

The Italian at once accosted him.

"Gooda evening," he said, assuming the peculiar dialect common to the sons of Italy who have been long enough in this country to talk fluently in English.

"I am the mana you wanta to see," the spy announced.

The stranger surveyed him earnestly for a moment.

"Why, you are not much more than a boy," he remarked, in a hoarse voice, which was evidently assumed to disguise his own tones.

The spy pricked up his ears, figuratively speaking, for before the man got half way through the sentence he was sure that he had heard the voice before, although the man was doing his best to disguise his tones.

But acute as was the sleuth-hound he was puzzled to identify the man, although he was sure that this was not the first time he had encountered him.

"I am not so younga as I look, and when dere is a gooda job to be done I am the mana to do it better than the olda mans who is clumsy, and cannot get away if der cops are after him."

"Hush! be careful how you speak!" continued the other.

"There's no telling but there may be a bloodhound in disguise right in the neighborhood at this very minute!"

"Yes, yes, dat may be so."

And the spy laughed in his sleeve to think how correct was the statement.

"A street of this kind filled with a crowd, is no place to talk business," the stranger remarked.

"Dat is true."

"We will go over to Michigan avenue, where there isn't any crowd and we will be able to talk without danger that our words will be overheard."

"Yes, yes, dat is goot."

Then the two proceeded through a cross street to the "swell" avenue of Chicago.

Michigan avenue was solitude itself when compared with busy, bustling State street, which may be aptly termed the Bowery of Chicago.

There was hardly a pedestrian to the block, and after they turned into the avenue, the stranger glanced around and said with an air of satisfaction:

"There, we can talk here without any danger that some spy may shadow us."

"Yes, yes, no danger."

"Has the nature of the job been explained to you?"

"Oh, yes, it is to put a woman out of der way," the Italian replied in a matter-of-fact way.

"And are you willing to undertake the work?"

"Yes, for a gooda bit of money, and if der risk is not too greata."

"The party I represent will give a hundred dollars."

"Oh, well, that is not so bada," the other remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And the risk is not great, for the woman doesn't amount to anything, and after she is put out of the way there will not be anybody in particular to kick up a row about the job."

"Dat is gooda!"

"She is a singer in one of these variety dives, and, of course, is obliged to keep late hours."

"Yes, yes, I see."

"The place seldom closes until near midnight, and then she goes home, and often alone, through the deserted streets, so there is a fine opportunity for a man to get at her with either a knife or a pistol."

"A knife is the besta!" the Italian declared.

"The pistol you bang—maka too much noise—the cops catcha on, and ze devil is to pay."

"Yes, that is very true," the stranger remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"The knife does its work quietly."

"Yes, yes, mucha ze best."

"Will you undertake to do the job?"

"For a hundred dolla, yes."

"Now then, how are we going to arrange about the payment?" the man remarked, in a reflective way.

"You are a stranger to me, as I am to you, and it is only natural that we should not place a great deal of trust in each other."

"That is aright," the Italian assented, with his usual shrug of the shoulders.

"Now then, it isn't exactly the square thing for me to pay you for the job in advance, for I am the kind of sport who always wants to get a run for his money, and, maybe, you will not be able to do the job, no matter how hard you may try."

"That is so, and if I do not get ze dolla in advance, after ze womans is dead, you mighta give me the granda laugh instead of der cash," the Italian suggested.

"Oh, no, you need not be afraid of my trying any game of that kind, for I wouldn't do it!" the stranger declared.

"I want a run for my money, of course, but I will give you a square deal, every time, and the only trouble is to fix the thing so we will both be satisfied."

"Yes, it is a bada job," the Italian responded with a dubious shake of the head.

"I will tell you how we will fix it," the stranger remarked after cogitating over the matter for a few moments.

"The job will have to be done at night, while she is on her way home from the music-hall to the house where she lives, which is about four streets away."

"There is one dark block which will be a good place for the trick to be worked."

"I will be in about the middle of the block with a horse and buggy; you can pretend to be talking to me when the woman approaches, and then, as she goes by, a good stroke of your knife in the back, just at the spine will be mighty apt to settle her accounts with this world."

"Oh, yes, and I cana handle ze knife wiz ze best of dem!" the Italian declared with true professional pride.

"One single stab ought to do the business," the stranger remarked, reflectively.

"Yes, yes, one will be enough. I knowa how to do ze work!"

"Then you can run for the buggy, and as soon as you are in off we will go—I will take care to have a good horse, you know, a trotter which will be hard to beat—and so, even if there is any one in the neighborhood near enough to give an immediate alarm the chances are a thousand to one that we will be out of sight before any pursuit can be given."

"It is a fina scheme!"

"Then I can pay you the money, and be satisfied that you have done your work according to the agreement."

"Yes, yes, it is a gooda plan!"

CHAPTER XXX.

PLAYING THE SPY.

"I do not see any reason why that scheme will not work to perfection," the stranger remarked.

"Oh, yes."

"And now the next thing is to take you to see the woman, and then examine the ground so as to be sure in regard to the best spot to pull off the trick," the other remarked.

"That is a gooda idea."

The two proceeded through one of the cross streets to Wabash avenue, and took an uptown car.

In due time they arrived at the Glorious Alcazar.

Upon entering they sat at a table in the rear of the hall.

The stranger called for beer, and just after it was served Florence Valentine came on the stage.

"That is the woman now," the stranger said in an undertone to his companion.

"Alla right! I will know her!" the Italian declared.

The pair remained until the skirt-dancer concluded her "turn," and then as she disappeared from the stage they departed.

"Now we will examine the locality where the job must be done," the stranger remarked, as they went out into the night.

"We will go around to the stage-door of the theater, and wait until the woman comes out," he continued.

"Ah, yes."

"Then we can follow her so as to see which way she usually takes to go home."

"We will be careful, of course, to keep well in the rear, so as not to excite her suspicions, for she might take the alarm if she discovered that a couple of strange men were apparently following her."

"Yes, yes, that is so."

The pair were now going along the side-street, and as it was deserted they were able to converse with perfect freedom.

"There is only one route that she can take, unless she goes out of her way," the stranger explained.

"She lives on the fourth street below the block where the music hall is situated, and as her house is the second one from the corner, the direct road for her is to go down the street on the same side of the way as

that on which is the stage-door of the theater, then, when she reaches her street, she has only a few steps to go."

"Yes, yes; me see!"

"The last block is a dark one, and that is the best place to do the trick, I think."

The Italian nodded his head in assent.

"We can lie in wait a hundred feet or so from the corner," the stranger explained. "And then as soon as the blow is struck it will only take a moment for you to jump into the buggy, and, in a twinkling, we can be around the corner in the side street; then, if pursuit is given, which is very unlikely, we can double around the next corner, and keep on at that game until we have given the slip to the men who are after us."

"Not mucha chance!" the Italian declared, with a wise shake of the head.

"Nobody here now," he continued.

By this time they had reached the corner, and were gazing down the street upon which the stage-door of the music hall was situated.

"Why anybody be in the street when we do the job, hey?"

"Oh, yes, you are right; there isn't much chance that there will be any one in the neighborhood at the time when the trick is worked, but it is always prudent to be prepared for anything that may happen."

"Dat is a-right!"

"Therefore, when I am getting up a job of this kind I always try to arrange the affair so I will not get tripped up, no matter what happens."

"Ah, yes; dat is a gooda way," the Italian declared.

"I think I have the scheme arranged so it will go through all right, and as far as I can see, there is mighty little chance of our getting nabbed after the deed is done," the stranger remarked, in a reflective way.

"That is the important point, you know," he continued.

"It is easy enough to get the chance to do the job—easy enough to give the woman a knife-thrust, which will settle her accounts with this world, but to get off after the work is done is the difficult point."

"Ah, but ze buggy settles dat alla right!" the Italian exclaimed.

"Yes, it is a great scheme, but let us cross to the opposite corner," the stranger continued.

"There is an unoccupied house there; we can sit down on the steps, and wait until the woman comes out of the music-hall."

The Italian nodded assent, then the two crossed the street, and took seats on the stoop of the empty house.

The pair were in the shade, so that while the light which burned at the back door of the Glorious Alcazar enabled them to have a good view of that neighborhood, yet they would be able to escape observation.

"This will do very nicely," the stranger remarked after they were seated.

"Yes, very gooda."

"What is your name?"

"Matteo Bossa."

"Mine is Bell—Charley Bell."

"Oh, yes, Bell."

"We will not have long to wait, for the performance will soon be over."

This statement was correct, for within fifteen minutes the working people began to come out of the stage-door, showing that the entertainment had come to an end.

Ten minutes more and Florence Valentine made her appearance.

The pair followed her until she disappeared around the corner of the street where her house was situated.

The stranger showed the Italian the spot where he intended to halt the carriage.

"What do you say to trying the game to-morrow night?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, that will a-dol!"

Then, after arranging the plan of meeting, the two separated.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HARD AT WORK.

AFTER parting with the stranger, the Italian went through the cross street to the westward, while the other proceeded in an eastern direction.

"Wouldn't I like to shadow that fellow and see where he goes!" the spy muttered.

"But a game of that kind is altogether too risky for me to attempt to play, for this man

is an extra sharp fellow, and the chances are great that he would discover that he was being watched, no matter how carefully the shadow might work.

"I feel certain that this is not the first time we have met, for his voice is familiar to me, although he tried his best to disguise it."

"But, though I am certain that I have met the man before, yet I am inclined to the belief that he is not much more than a stranger to me, or else I would be able to recognize the voice so as to place him."

"As to who he is, it requires no prophet to make a guess in regard to that."

"There is only one person in existence who has reason to wish that Florence Valentine was out of the world, and that is her husband, James Alexander, the gambler."

"He knows enough of the woman's vengeful nature to be afraid that, if she happens to meet him, the memory of her wrongs will nerve her hand to strike at his life."

"The rascal reasons that, sooner or later, he and she are bound to meet, and as he has come to the conclusion that it is either his life or hers, he means to get in the first blow."

"Of course, there is the chance that this may not be Alexander in person, but some go-between whom he has employed, but from the pains the man has taken to disguise himself, and from the fact, too, that he is evidently no common fellow, although he is trying to appear like one, I don't think there is much doubt that he is really Alexander."

"If this is the truth, then I have either made a mistake in thinking I have heard his voice, for I never met any Alexander, or else he was going by some other name when I encountered him."

"That is possible, of course, and I think it is the reasonable explanation, for I don't believe I could make a mistake in regard to being familiar with his voice."

While the spy had been indulging in these meditations he had been proceeding at a good pace as though anxious to reach a certain destination.

A somewhat zigzag course, down one street, along another, and then up the next he had passed through, and whenever he turned a corner he had been careful to look behind him as though afraid that a watcher was on his track.

The streets were almost deserted, only a solitary wayfarer visible now and then, and the Italian did not see anything to excite his apprehensions.

"I didn't know but he might take it into his head to try a little shadow business on me," the spy muttered.

"But I think he is satisfied that I am all right and just the man he wants to attend to this little job."

Then the Italian began to retrace his steps, and as he turned abruptly, if there had been a spy on his track he surely would have seen him.

Not a soul did he encounter, though, for quite a while, so he was satisfied that he had not been followed.

"Now let me see about the programme," the spy soliloquized.

"The Glorious Alcazar will have to get along without my presence for another evening, even if I have to give up all the weekly stipend which the old Dutchman agreed to give me."

"And the first thing in the morning I must proceed to make arrangements so that the little drama which must be played to-morrow night will be enacted in good style."

"I do not doubt that this cunning gentleman who has been to such pains to get up this scheme, will be wonderfully astonished at the way in which it will end."

"But then a thrilling and unexpected wind-up to a play is always expected."

And the spy chuckled merrily as he meditated over the details of the scheme.

It did not take the Italian long to reach the house of the ex-clown, and, being provided with a latch-key, he gained entrance without any trouble.

Everybody in the dwelling was in bed, and fast asleep, so the spy encountered no one in going to the room.

Soon the man's garb was discarded and the woman's night-robe assumed.

It was with a feeling of intense satisfaction that the Serio-Comic sought her couch.

"This is a side issue, of course, and not the main stake," she murmured.

"And to bring this case to a successful close is not like winning a victory in the other one, but a success in this affair makes me hope that I will not fail in the more important and original venture."

Ten minutes later this indefatigable woman was in the land of dreams.

She woke early in the morning, according to her usual custom, dressed herself in her every-day walking garb, and then departed.

She stopped for her breakfast at the restaurant in the neighborhood, and while the meal was being prepared meditated over the situation.

"Now then, the question comes up: Is it wise to allow Florence to know anything about this matter?" she mused.

"She is nervous and rather inclined to be flighty."

"If I trust the secret to her, can I be sure that she will be willing to carry the scheme out in the way that I wish?"

The Serio-Comic shook her head.

"I have considerable doubt in regard to that matter," she continued.

"She is a creature of impulse, and if she was informed that her husband is not only here in Chicago, but trying to make arrangements to have her killed, the chances are great that she would become so excited as to lose all control over herself."

"Then, instead of being willing to play a certain part in order to entrap the scoundrel, the chances are great that she would yield to a wild impulse to take the law into her own hands and with the aid of a revolver attempt to kill the man."

"Then all the fat would be in the fire, as the saying is."

"No, no, that will not do at all!" the Serio-Comic exclaimed, decidedly.

"If I trust her with the secret the chances are a hundred to one that she will upset everything."

Then the sleuth-hound reflected about the matter for a few moments.

"Yes, yes, that will do," she said at last, having arranged a satisfactory plan in her mind.

"The scheme can be carried out and she forced to play the part which I want her to act, without her being aware that there is anything out of the common going on."

The arrival of the waiter with the breakfast put an end to her meditations.

After she finished the meal, she took a car for lower Chicago, and there made the necessary arrangements to enable her to carry out the scheme which she had planned.

It was afternoon when she reached the variety hall, and there she explained to the old stage-manager that she would not be able to appear that night.

"It is all right," the veteran replied. "I expected that the old Dutchman would kick like a steer, but he took the matter quietly, and all you will lose will be the night's salary."

"In fact, the old man seemed to be rather glad to get a chance to cut off a little, on account of business being so bad."

"Well, I am glad that he wasn't angry, and I am much obliged to you for your kindness."

Then the Serio-Comic returned to her home, and, as before, enjoyed a sleep, so as to be fresh for the important work which was to come.

She had locked the door and taken the key out, so as to give the impression, if any one examined the door, that she was out.

After darkness set in she transformed herself into the Italian again, then stole quietly from the house, and proceeded to make one of the limited audience which had assembled in the Glorious Alcazar.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE AMBUSH.

As it was not necessary for the Italian to be on the ground where the scheme was to be worked until about eleven o'clock, he thought he might as well put in the time in the music-hall as to go elsewhere.

And so complete was the Serio-Comic's disguise that the proprietor of the place, old

Grundbaum, sat down for ten or fifteen minutes at [the same table where the supposed Italian was, and surveyed him with considerable curiosity, without recognizing that it was any one whom he had ever seen before.

The old Dutchman took particular notice of the Italian, for it was the first one whom he had ever seen in his place, for the "Dagos," as a rule, do not patronize places of amusement.

At eleven o'clock the spy took his departure.

He went down the side street, then turned, and walked by the back door of the theater, going straight on.

The night was a rather dark one, and as the street was not particularly well lighted, the Italian could not distinguish the buggy until he came within a block of it.

The carriage was standing in the precise spot which the stranger had indicated when he arranged the scheme.

The horse was heading down the street, and the driver was looking out at the side of the carriage, keeping a watch up the thoroughfare.

He nodded as the Italian approached.

"You are right on time," he said.

"Oh, yes, me always on a-hand," the youth responded, with a grin, as he halted by the side of the carriage.

"We will not have long to wait, if she comes at about the same time as she did last night."

"No, no, not long."

"Are you all ready for the job?"

"Me a-ready!" the Italian declared, and as he spoke he flashed an ugly-looking knife in the face of the stranger.

The movement was performed so abruptly, and the knife gleamed so unexpectedly before the stranger's eyes, that he started.

"Be careful!" he exclaimed with a quick glance around.

"That is alla right!" the Italian declared.

"Nobody is about!" But as he spoke he returned the knife to his pocket.

"Well, you cannot be too careful in a matter of this sort, you know," the other warned.

"Yes, me know."

"I don't think that there is anybody in the neighborhood, for I have been here ten or fifteen minutes and have not seen any one."

"No, no, nobody about."

"Still, there might be some one lurking in the shade of one of these doorways, and although our talking together would not be apt to excite any particular attention, yet, if any one saw you flourish that knife it undoubtedly would make them think that something out of the common was going to take place."

"Yes, yes, maybe dat is so," the Italian admitted. I willa be more careful."

"It is just the right kind of a night for a game of this kind," the stranger observed with a glance up at the gloomy sky.

"Oh, yes, a nicea night—just so dark dat I can see how to a strike the woman, and yet she a-no see me time enough to get away," the Italian remarked with a grin as though he considered the matter to be something of a joke.

"As far as I can see there is only one thing which may interfere with our little scheme," the stranger remarked in a reflective way:

"What is dat?"

"If the woman should happen to have somebody with her."

"Yes, dat would not be gooda!"

"Last night she was alone, but then that doesn't prove that she will be alone to-night."

The Italian nodded assent.

"But as far as I can see that is the only thing which can interfere with our game."

"Ah, well, it does not a-matter," the Italian remarked with an air of indifference.

"It would be a-better if she was alone, but if she is not, I will not be afraid to do a the job."

"I will strike her from behind, you understand!" The Italian's eyes flashed, while his countenance wore a ferocious expression, and he gesticulated in pantomime fashion how he would deal the blow.

"You a-see the first thing the woman knows will a be when she feels ze knife," the bravo continued.

"Oh, yes, of course, I understand that you intend to take her by surprise."

"What will it a-matter, then, s'pose she has some one with her?" the Italian asked, in an extremely matter-of-fact way.

"Certainly, you can strike the blow just the same," the stranger responded.

"Yes, yes, if there be a dozen with her it will not make any difference to me. I will a-slice her all the same," the Italian coolly declared.

"The only danger is that if she is in company with some one they may try to capture you after the blow is struck," the other explained.

"Bah! I am not afraid of dat!" the bravo declared.

"If she a woman has with her, and the woman tries to stop me, the flash of the knife in her face will a-soon make her to yeli with fear."

"Yes, if it is a woman there will not be any trouble, but if it should happen to be a man—"

"Ah, well, it makes no difference! Man or woman, when I a-show ze knife they will not lay hold of a-me."

"But if it should be a man, and he is armed with a revolver—a great many men carry pistols now, you know?"

"Oh, I care not!" the Italian responded, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

"S'pose a man draws ze pistol on me, will I not give him a slash of ze knife so quick that he will a-get no chance to fire?"

"It is only two slashes of ze knife instead of one."

"Hush! I think I hear some one coming down the street!" the stranger exclaimed, abruptly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ATTACK.

The two listened attentively.

The ears of the stranger had not deceived him.

As the night was perfectly still, any sound could be distinctly heard.

The street was a lonely one, and but little used by pedestrians even in the daytime, so at a late hour at night, such as at present, was practically deserted.

There was some one coming down the street, advancing at a good pace, and as the men listened they were soon able to distinguish the rustle of a woman's garments.

"It is a woman, and she is alone!" the stranger exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

"Ah, yes, and if it is our bird, we will a-do the trick without any trouble," the Italian responded in the same cautious tones.

"It probably is, but we must be sure, for it would be awkward to attack the wrong party," the man in the carriage remarked, peering up the street, anxious to distinguish the new-comer.

"I will not make any mistake!" the bravo declared in the most confident manner.

"I did me a-go into ze theater to-night and saw the woman again so as to be sure to a-know her."

"That was a good idea," the stranger responded.

"But I don't think there is much doubt about this being our game, for she is the only woman who would be apt to come down the street at this late hour."

"Yes, yes, oh, it is she I do a guess," the Italian remarked.

"It is her, I think, so get all ready to do the job," the stranger warned in a hurried whisper.

"All a right; I am ready!" the bravo answered.

It was, indeed, Florence Valentine, the skirt-dancer.

She came on at a brisk pace, without a thought that any danger awaited her, for the women connected with the stage are so accustomed to walking the streets at a late hour of the night that they always proceed as fearlessly as in the broad daylight.

The Italian pretended to be engaged in an earnest conversation with the man in the carriage as Florence approached.

The skirt-dancer came hurrying along, and though she noticed the carriage drawn up by the sidewalk, yet she did not pay any particular attention to it.

She had no apprehension that there was

anybody in the world who would wish to do her harm, and so was not on the lookout for danger.

But if she had been threatened in any way, she was too keen-witted not to take notice of the carriage and to be on her guard when approaching it.

As it was, she came on totally unsuspecting of danger, and being occupied by her thoughts did not even cast a glance at the carriage as she came up to it.

But the moment she passed the Italian, he sprung upon her with all the quickness and ferocity of a tiger.

The knife flashed in the air, and then, in another instant, was apparently driven in up to the hilt in the back of the skirt-dancer.

The stroke was not delivered with a downward motion, after the usual fashion of using a dagger, but the Italian made a straight lunge with it just as though it had been a sword.

With a loud shriek the woman fell forward upon her face.

Then, with wonderful quickness, the Italian sprung into the buggy.

But just as he gained the carriage—just as the stranger tightened his hold on the reins and chirruped to start the horse, a man, who had been concealed in a doorway just opposite the horse's head, sprung out.

With one hand he grasped the steed's bridle, and with the other leveled a revolver at the pair in the carriage.

This unexpected appearance produced a great impression on the Italian.

"Diavolo!" he screamed, and then down he went all in a heap on the floor of the carriage.

He fell in such a clumsy manner that he became tangled in the reins, and his weight forced them out of the hands of his companion, so that he had no control over the horse.

If he had desired to attempt to drive over the man who had hold of the animal's rein, this "accident" effectually put a stop to it.

The second after the first man so unexpectedly appeared, two more ran from across the street.

These two were policemen in uniform, and they had their revolvers out, all ready for action.

Just an instant the bearded stranger gazed in impotent rage at the three, who, seemingly, had sprung like apparitions from the earth, and then a bitter curse came from his lips.

He comprehended that he was in the toils. Both he and his companion had been caught red-handed, as the saying is, and there was not the slightest chance for him to escape.

"Do not attempt to offer any resistance!" warned the powerfully-built, stern-faced man who stood by the head of the horse.

It was the veteran detective, Joe Phenix, who spoke.

"You are in the hands of the law, and if you do not submit quietly, it will be the worse for you," the thief-taker continued.

A moment the bearded man looked in the muzzles of the threatening revolvers, and then, realizing that it was indeed useless for him to make a struggle, said, in a sulky way:

"I am not going to make any trouble."

"That is where you are wise," the veteran detective responded.

"Get out of the carriage, both of you, so we can put the bracelets on," he continued.

The Italian obeyed with prompt alacrity, but his companion was rather slow in his movements, and it was plain that he took his capture very much to heart.

By the time the handcuffs were on the men, Joe Phenix had got the skirt-dancer on her feet.

She was so weak from agitation that she could scarcely stand.

"Are you badly hurt?" Joe Phenix asked.

"I don't really know," she replied, having all she could do to speak.

"As I went down I threw out my hands, involuntarily, so as to protect my face, but he gave me a terrible blow in the back."

"I think he tried to stab you, for I saw the flash of a knife in his hands," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Yes, I will a-own up!" the Italian declared.

"I did a-try to killa her," he continued.
 "I will turn State's evidence—you a-bear me a-witness to dat!"

"Dis mans—he a-hire me to killa the woman for a hundred dolla!"

"It is a lie," the bearded man cried, fiercely.

"No, no, it is ze truth—I swear to dat!" the Italian exclaimed.

Meanwhile the skirt-dancer had tried to see if she was wounded.

"I don't think he has stabbed me," she said. "For although he gave me a violent blow, so that the hurt pains me yet, I don't think my dress is cut, and I cannot discover any blood."

"I have on a very thick jacket, and that is what has probably saved me," Florence explained.

"Do you know this man?" Joe Phenix asked. "Take a good look at him."

"No, I do not," the skirt-dancer answered, after making the examination.

"And you don't know of any reason why he should wish to attempt your life?" the detective questioned.

"No, sir, I do not."

"This fellow lies, for I didn't hire him to kill the woman!" the bearded man exclaimed.

"Why should I want to have her killed? She is a stranger to me. You never saw me before, did you?"

"No, never!" Florence replied.

"He did a-hire me!" the Italian protested. "It is he who lies—I tella truth!" he insisted, vehemently.

"Why should I wanta to killa this woman? I know her not! Never did I see her before."

"Madame, you looka me straight in ze face; did you ever see a me at any time?"

"No; I never saw this man—I never saw either one of them," Florence declared decidedly.

Joe Phenix had stepped to the side of the bearded man so as to afford the skirt-dancer a chance to get a good look at him, and now he thought it was time to make a move.

"Perhaps the man will look considerably different with his hat off," he insinuated.

Then he removed—not only the prisoner's hat but the wig and the false beard as well.

The change in the man's appearance was wonderful.

Florence started in surprise and gave a little scream.

"Oh, I know him now!" she exclaimed; "and I do not wonder he wanted to have me killed so as to get me out of the way. He is my husband, who robbed and deserted me, James Alexander!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LAME DEFENSE.

THE Italian was almost as much surprised by the sight of the man's face as the skirt-dancer, for, although he felt pretty certain that the man who was so eager to compass the death of the woman was the gambler husband, who had treated the skirt-dancer so badly in New Orleans, yet as he had never met the man he did not expect to be able to recognize him.

But he did, though, as soon as the disguise was removed so he could see what the man really looked like.

"No wonder that I thought his voice sounded familiar to me," the spy muttered, as soon as he got a view of the man's face.

But, it was not as James Alexander that the Italian knew him. No; he was the assumed John W. Mackay, the Californian, the particular friend of Leonard McClenahan, whom the sleuth-hound had encountered when he sought the McClenahan mansion in disguise.

"Well, well, this is entirely unexpected," the spy mused.

"And I must say that it is a piece of rare good luck for my actor friend, Bob Montgomery, as it removes from his path the man who threatened to be a dangerous rival."

"Oh, what a deep game this fellow was playing! No wonder he was anxious to get his wife out of the way."

"He had made up his mind to make a prey of the heiress, Leonora McClenahan, but of course, he couldn't marry her as long as his wife was alive."

Joe Phenix had performed the trick of removing the wig and beard so adroitly that

the man had no idea of what the detective was up to until the act was done.

Under the circumstances he couldn't help himself though, but he put on a bold front, although fearfully enraged.

"That is a falsehood!" he cried, defiantly.

"My name is not Alexander, but Richmond—James Richmond, and I don't know you, woman; I never saw you before in my life!"

"How can you give utterance to such a wicked lie as that?" Florence demanded.

"Gentlemen, as I am a living, breathing woman, I swear to you that this is my husband, James Alexander, and I pronounce him as great a villain as walks the earth this day!"

"He deserted me when I lay sick and helpless, after robbing me of all my savings."

"Oh, he is a wretch if ever there was one!"

"Well, madam, he has contrived to get himself in a pretty bad hole just now, and there isn't any doubt but he will go up to Joliet for a term of years, for in this case we certainly have got him dead to rights," Joe Phenix averred.

"I think you will find out, before you get through with this affair, that you haven't got half as strong a case as you are inclined to believe!" the prisoner warned, with an ugly scowl.

"It is always wise to present a bold front, of course, but you know better than that, if you have any sense," Joe Phenix retorted.

"The evidence against you is particularly strong. This Italian swears that you hired him to kill the woman—"

"Yes, yes, me a-swear to that!" the bravo asserted, with decision.

"It is a lie!" Alexander exclaimed, hotly.

"And who would believe a mean, miserable rascal of this kind? Kah! He would swear to anything for a five-dollar note!"

"Me no bigger rascal than you!" the Italian returned, defiantly.

"The woman is your wife, whom you robbed and deserted, and, no doubt, you have some good reason for wishing to get her out of the way," Joe Phenix now explained. "What that motive is will probably be developed on your trial."

A shade came over the face of the gambler, and the Italian, who was watching him closely, did not fail to note the expression. From the knowledge which he possessed of the man, it was an easy matter to surmise why the prisoner was disturbed.

If it was discovered that he had been masquerading in Chicago as a wealthy Californian and paying attentions to a young and beautiful heiress, it would not be difficult for any one to guess why he desired to get rid of his lawful wife.

"You will find out in time that this charge against me doesn't amount to anything," the gambler declared with an air of bravado.

"Well, sometimes perhaps it is wise to keep a stiff upper lip," Joe Phenix remarked in a reflective way.

"But when a man is caught dead to rights, as you certainly are in this case, it will not do much good."

"The woman is your wife, with whom you have had trouble, and the Italian swears that you hired him to kill her."

"You were waiting in a carriage, so as to be sure that the job was done and carefully disguised too; the idea of that dodge being to keep your wife from recognizing you if she should happen to get a view of your face as she went by."

"Then, after the Italian struck the blow, he ran to the carriage, and you were about to drive off with him when we nabbed you."

Thus clearly did the veteran detective sketch the situation and show the gambler how strong was the case against him.

And although Alexander was a shrewd, keen-witted fellow, yet so well had the spy, disguised as the Italian, played his part that he had no suspicion that he was the victim of a carefully designed and skillfully executed scheme.

The presence of the police in the neighborhood he believed to be due to the chance of accident.

They were after other game, and were lucky enough to stumble upon him.

Things of this kind often occur, and the gambler had no thought that his capture was

due to a shrewd scheme, and not to chance alone.

"I don't know anything about this Italian," the gambler declared, stubbornly.

"I was driving through the street and he hailed me to inquire if I knew where a Mr. Busso—or some such name—lived."

"Seeing that he didn't speak very good English, and was apparently a stranger, I pulled in to the curb in order to tell him that the best thing for him to do was to try and find the man he was after by daylight—to come in the morning and inquire in the stores in the neighborhood."

"Then, just as I was talking to him, the woman came along and he jumped at her."

"He may have had a knife, but I didn't notice it for I was completely astonished by the man's action, and came to the conclusion that he had a crazy fit."

"After he knocked the woman over he ran and jumped into my buggy, and before I had a chance to put him out you fellows were at me."

"Oh, no! you tried to drive off, and would have done so, if we had not intercepted you," Joe Phenix declared.

"But, really, you know, we are wasting time in talking about the matter."

"You will have a chance to explain all about it when you are arraigned in court in the morning," Joe Phenix said in conclusion.

"Are you going to take me to jail then?" the prisoner asked, sullenly.

"Oh, yes, under the circumstances we could not let you go, even if your explanation was much more reasonable than it is," Joe Phenix replied.

"This Italian makes a direct charge that you hired him to commit murder, and an accusation of that kind must be disposed of in court, of course, so you will have to go with us."

"Well, as I can't help myself, I will have to submit," the gambler remarked with a very bad grace.

Then Alexander explained about the stable where he had hired the buggy, and one of the policemen drove off to return it.

The other escorted Alexander, while Joe Phenix brought up the rear with the Italian, first escorting the skirt-dancer to her home.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EXAMINATION.

PURPOSELY the last couple walked slower than the first so that they were soon so far behind that they could converse without danger of their words being overheard by the others.

Then the spy related to Joe Phenix all the particulars in regard to the gambler.

"Strange how things of this kind will happen every now and then," the veteran detective remarked in a reflective way.

"Apparently the two affairs had no connection, and yet they were closely related."

"Yes, it was a lucky stroke of fortune for my actor friend, Bob Montgomery," the spy observed.

"This supposed Californian, with his great wealth, was a most dangerous rival, but now that he is out of the way Montgomery ought to be able to get the girl, although I do not doubt that there will be trouble with the brother."

"You will have to try and see if you can't bulldoze him a little after the style which you outlined," Joe Phenix suggested.

"Yes, the game is worth trying."

"By the way, I suppose you have arranged the matter so I will not be locked up in jail," the spy said, abruptly.

"For just at present there is a lot of work for me to do."

"Oh, yes, that is all arranged with the chief of police, for I explained the circumstances to him."

"After your appearance in court tomorrow you will be carried to Police Headquarters, and there, apparently, locked up."

"I will have whatever clothes you wish there for you, and after you have transmogrified yourself, you can walk out without anybody but the superintendent, and his immediate assistants, being the wiser."

And the affair was arranged in this way.

In the morning Alexander was arraigned before the court to answer the charge brought against him by the Italian.

Florence Valentine appeared and gave her evidence.

"The gambler had retained a skillful lawyer, but the case against the prisoner was too strong for the lawyer to be able to do much for his client.

This was merely a preliminary examination, and when the judge decided that a strong enough case had been made out to warrant him in holding the prisoner, the lawyer urged that bail be accepted.

As it happened the judge on the bench was a stern old gentleman, and as the evidence had convinced him that the man was guilty, he declined to fix the bail at less than ten thousand dollars.

"That means that I must stay in jail," the accused remarked to his lawyer.

"I am a stranger here in Chicago, and it is not possible for me to find bondsmen willing to put up so large a sum."

The gambler realized that he was in a tight place, and so had resolved upon following a certain course.

He denied strenuously that he was James Alexander, the skirt-dancer's husband, and swore in the most positive manner that he had never seen her before.

He did not state that his name was Mackay, and that he was from California, for he was anxious to keep that quiet, but claimed to be one James Richmond, from New Orleans.

The man did not think there was much danger that there would be any one in the court-room who would recognize him, for the men whose acquaintances he had made while passing off as the rich Californian were not likely to be in the court-room.

He hoped to avoid recognition, for he knew that if the fact came out that he had called himself Mackay, and pretended to be from California, it would hurt his case.

But there was a man in the audience, sitting away back by the door, who recognized that the man who now called himself James Richmond, was the one who had said that his name was John W. Mackay, and claimed to be a relative of the great bonanza king.

And this man was Leonard McClenahan.

He was in the court-room because Joe Phenix had made it his business to call on him that morning, and explain that the supposed Californian was nothing but a common, swindling gambler, sailing under false colors.

Of course McClenahan got very indignant at first, for he regarded the assertion as a base slander.

But Joe Phenix in his cool, calm way told the young man that there wasn't any slander in the case.

"I know what I am talking about!" he declared.

"The man will be arraigned in court this morning as James Alexander, charged by an Italian bravo with hiring him to kill his wife, whom he robbed and deserted a few years ago in New Orleans.

"He denies the charge, claims that his name is James Richmond, and admits that he is a sport from New Orleans, but he doesn't claim that he is Mackay, the Californian."

"There must be some mistake about the matter!" McClenahan exclaimed, sorely puzzled.

"No, no, no mistake at all," Joe Phenix replied.

"The man deceived you by sailing under false colors," he continued.

"But you need not take my word for it, you know," the veteran added.

"If you will take the trouble to come to the court at nine o'clock, you can see the man placed on trial with your own eyes, and then you can decide for yourself whether you have been deceived or not."

And the detective's words produced so great an impression upon McClenahan that he did go to the court.

He was amazed by what he saw.

The accused was the man whom he had believed to be a rich Californian.

McClenahan kept in the background, and when the examination ended, departed, feeling greatly disgusted.

"No wonder that the fellow succeeded in winning my money whenever I played with him," he muttered after he got into the street.

"Hang me! the idea that I should be tricked by this miserable card sharper. I am thoroughly ashamed of myself."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FEMALE DETECTIVE.

LEONARD McCLENAHAN was one of those men who considered himself to be extra sharp, and when a man of that kind wakes to the consciousness that he has been made a fool of, he is always extremely disgusted.

"And to think that I did my best to force Leonora into a marriage with this infernal scoundrel!" he exclaimed, as he proceeded to Wabash avenue where he was going to take a car for up-town.

"It is a lucky thing that the girl was stubborn, or otherwise she would have been made a victim.

"Egad! it will never do to let her know what an escape she has had, for if she knew the truth, I would never hear the end of it.

"I will have to get up some cock-and-bull story about his being suddenly called away to California on business to account for his absence.

"There isn't much danger of ever being troubled by the fellow again," McClenahan mused.

"From what I heard of the evidence, I don't think there is a doubt but that the fellow will be convicted and sent to jail for a term of years," the young man soliloquized.

"The wife said she did not know why he wanted to murder her; there is a mystery about the affair which I could clear up easily enough.

"He wanted the wife out of the way, so he could marry my sister, the infernal scoundrel!"

"But you can bet high that I am not going to interfere in the case, and so give all the world a chance to know what a fool I made of myself or how slickly this cunning rascal pulled the wool over my eyes.

"No, no! I will keep in the background!"

McClenahan was in a very bad humor when he arrived at home, and, to allay the annoyance which he felt, ordered out his trotter and went for a drive.

In a couple of hours he returned, and was informed that there was a lady in the parlor who desired to see him.

"She has been here about half an hour, sir," the servant remarked.

"I told her that you had gone out for a drive, and you might not be home for some time, but she said that her business was important and she would wait."

McClenahan was somewhat surprised by the information, for he could not imagine what business any strange lady could have with him.

When he entered the parlor, he found Rosamond Raymond there.

The Serio-Comic had assumed another disguise.

A dark-brown wig hid her own hair, altogether changing the expression of her face, making her appear much older.

She was dressed in a handsome dark suit, and looked the lady to perfection.

"Excuse my calling upon you without being introduced," she said, rising as McClenahan entered the room.

"But I wished to see you upon an important business matter, and in business we cannot always stand upon ceremony, you know.

"I am in the detective line," she added.

McClenahan looked the surprise which he felt.

"In the detective line?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir, and as I wish to speak to you in regard to an important business matter, would you mind closing the door so that our interview will be a private one?"

"Certainly not," and the gentleman complied with the request.

"I am at a loss, though, to guess the nature of your business," he continued, as he took a chair, the female detective having resumed her seat.

"Well, in the first place, I come in reference to the case of this man who calls himself James Richmond, and is accused of having hired an Italian to kill his wife," the Serio-Comic explained, in a brisk, business-like way.

McClenahan was taken completely by surprise, but he endeavored to conceal the feeling as much as possible.

His first thought was to deny that he either knew anything about the case, or took

any interest in the matter; then he suddenly reflected that it was possible that he might have been seen in the court-room, so it would be foolish for him to set up a plea of ignorance.

"Well, I do not exactly understand about this matter," he replied, slowly.

"Do you come to me on behalf of this Richmond?"

"Oh, no! I was the principal agent in securing his arrest, and as I know the man to be an unmitigated scoundrel, you can depend upon it that I am not going to do anything to aid him."

"Ah, yes, I comprehend."

"And I do not think you need to be under any apprehensions that the man will apply to you for assistance to aid him in getting out of the ugly scrape in which he is now involved.

"Of course, he has no suspicion that you know anything about his present plight," the Serio-Comic continued.

"If you recall the particulars of his examination you will remember that he persisted in saying that his name was James Richmond, and made no bones of admitting that he was a sport from New Orleans.

"The man was smart enough to understand that when a fellow gets into the hands of the police, it isn't of much use for him to set up a false record.

"It is a fact that in New Orleans he has gone under the name of James Richmond, although his right name is James Alexander.

"Now if he had said that his name was John W. Mackay, and claimed to come from California, it would not have taken long for the authorities, by the aid of the telegraph, to discover that he was a fraud."

"Yes, I presume that is a fact."

"He does not want any one to know that he has been playing a game of that kind here in Chicago, and, really, if I had not caught on to his tricks the chances are that he would not have been recognized, for the men whose acquaintance he made, when he pretended to be the rich Californian, would not be apt to wander into the police court during his trial, and the newspaper reports of the affair would not give any one a clue."

"Yes, that is certainly correct."

"It was a lucky escape for your sister, and I don't believe you would have ever been able to forgive yourself if you had succeeded in getting her to marry this rascal."

This speech took McClenahan entirely by surprise, and the annoyance which he felt was plainly apparent in his face.

"Really, madam, I must say that I think you are going a little too far!" he declared.

"Ah, yes, but in all matters of this kind it is well to speak plainly and to the point," the female detective remarked in her matter-of-fact way.

"It is on account of your sister that I visit you, and it will simplify matters if you comprehend, right at the beginning, that I am well-posted in regard to all that has occurred."

"Well, I must admit that I am very much surprised," McClenahan remarked, not knowing what to make of this strange affair.

"I suppose you are wondering why I take any interest in this matter."

"Yes, that is correct."

"Well, sir, I am acting for a gentleman who has fallen deeply in love with your sister and wishes to marry her."

"Oh, indeed! I am surprised!" McClenahan exclaimed.

And then in a very sarcastic way he said:

"May I ask if my sister has any knowledge of this gentleman, or are you planning a surprise for her?"

"She knows all about him, and is quite willing to become his wife, but hesitates to confide in you for she had an idea that you would not be willing to consent to the marriage, as you seemed to be so desirous of forcing her into a union with this, supposed to be, rich Californian."

"Really, your knowledge of my family affairs astonishes me!" the young man exclaimed with an expression of great annoyance.

"Yes, I am well-informed," Rosamond replied, coolly.

"People who follow my line of business are obliged to be, you know, or they would not be able to get on at all."

"Yes, I presume that is the truth, but,

really, I don't exactly see what you expect to accomplish by interfering in this matter.

"Do you hope to induce me to consent to the marriage of my sister to this unknown gentleman, who has managed to keep himself so secluded in the background?"

"Yes, that is my idea."

"Well, madam, allow me to inform you that I don't think you will be able to accomplish it!" McClenahan remarked, in a rather angry way.

"I think I can make it to your advantage to listen to reason in this matter," the spy suggested, with a quiet smile.

"I do not agree with you, for I am quite sure that this man must be objectionable in some way to me, or else he would not have kept in the dark so carefully," McClenahan declared.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PUTTING ON THE SCREWS.

The female detective smiled and shook her head.

"That is not the fault of the gentleman," she averred. "But now I am going to speak plainly. I don't doubt that you will get angry, but it will not do you any good. I have come to talk about this matter, and consider it my duty to go fully into the subject."

The young man surveyed the female detective for a moment, and then smiled in a contemptuous way.

"Well, I must say that you are about the coolest hand that I have met with in many a long day. Go ahead! I will hear what you have to say."

"The gentleman would not have kept in the background if your sister had not persuaded him so to do," the spy explained.

"The fact is, you have continued to inspire your sister with a great amount of terror, and she is reluctant to do anything which she thinks will provoke your anger."

"It is my duty to look out for her, and see that she doesn't make a fool of herself," the brother averred.

"I understand you have got her to believe that, by the terms of her father's will, if she marries before she is of age, without your consent, she forfeits her inheritance?"

"It is the truth!" McClenahan admitted, angrily. "The will *does* read in that way!"

"Yes, but the chances are a hundred to one it would be upset as far as that clause goes, if your sister should choose to get married without your consent and then go to law about the matter."

"That is merely your opinion, and it may or may not be valuable," the young man retorted with a sneer.

"Now I will come right down to business. Your sister wants to marry a certain man, and she feels quite sure in advance that you will not be willing she should."

"There must be something wrong about the fellow, else she wouldn't be so positive about the matter," McClenahan remarked in his ugly way.

"That doesn't follow. Your sister thinks that you are inclined to be unreasonable, and she does not believe that you will be willing for her to marry anybody but some one of your own selection, and feels perfectly sure you never will pick out a man who will be agreeable to her."

"Hasn't a good opinion of my judgment, then?" the brother intimated, with another sneer.

"In selecting a husband she would prefer to choose for herself, and she is willing to pay you a good round sum if you will allow her the privilege."

"Eh?" and McClenahan betrayed his astonishment.

"One hundred thousand dollars is the price she is prepared to pay."

"A hundred thousand!" echoed the brother, more and more astonished.

"That is the sum. She thinks she is rich enough to spare it, and would rather give up the money than have any trouble with you about the affair."

"Well, I must admit it certainly is a liberal offer," McClenahan assented.

"The gentleman whom she wishes to marry is not rich, neither is he a beggar nor a fortune-hunter, but a man with a profession which yields him a handsome yearly income, ample enough to support your sister in as

good style as she has been accustomed to in her own home."

"Well, that is not so bad."

"Another point; you have transacted some business for your sister, purchased and sold securities for her," the female detective said in a careless way, but with a peculiar look in her eyes.

McClenahan was looking her full in the face and did not fail to see the expression.

"Well, yes," he confessed, a suspicious look in his eyes. "I have attended to a little business for her from time to time, but what of it?"

"Your accounts of these transactions will be received without any question, and your statements will be accepted without an examination."

"But I do not exactly understand the meaning of this," he urged, suspiciously.

"It is to save you trouble," the Serio-Comic explained, with a meaning smile. "You are not a business man, you know, and it is possible that, in some of these transactions, you may have made some mistakes."

"Oh, yes, all men are liable to error," betraying evident uneasiness.

"Now if there should happen to be any tangle, and the lawyers had to be called in to straighten the matter out, there might be a great deal of trouble."

"Yes," McClenahan assented. "It is a lawyer's business to make mischief, anyway."

"But in the manner which I suggest the business can be arranged quietly, and without any outsiders having anything to do with the matter."

"That may be true."

"In my opinion your sister makes a very liberal offer, and you cannot do better than to accept it."

"Suppose, though, that I refuse?" the brother queried, evidently undecided.

"Then it will be war to the knife!" the female detective assured, with firm determination. "Your sister has made up her mind to marry the man she loves, and does not intend to wait until she is twenty-one, either."

"And after she is married she will call in the lawyers and attempt to break the will."

"Then, you comprehend, in the event of a bitter struggle taking place, if there *should* be any mistakes in the way in which you have handled your sister's property, the lawyers will undoubtedly try to make the most of the matter."

"Of course, you know your own business better than I do; but I should think that it would be wise in you to accept your sister's offer," the female detective argued.

McClenahan was not a particularly wise man, neither was he a fool, and so he did not fail to comprehend the situation.

In some mysterious way it had come to the knowledge of this female sleuth-hound that he had used some of his sister's wealth without going to the trouble of asking her advice about the matter.

He had trusted to the control which he had secured over her to prevent an examination, but, if the girl was roused into rebellion and an investigation was made, the truth would certainly come out, which would be apt to be extremely unpleasant for him.

He had made a sad mess of the Californian affair, there was no doubt about that; while so large a sum as a hundred thousand dollars would come in extremely handy, since there were certain schemes which promised to yield fortunes if he only had a certain amount of ready money to invest.

"Is my sister acquainted with all of the particulars of this affair?" he asked, at last.

"She is."

"Then I will summon her, and if she is willing to make this bargain you suggest, I will agree to it."

When Leonora came, McClenahan explained the matter to her, and the girl agreed to the conditions.

"Very well; I am willing to give my consent," the brother announced.

"Who is the man, by the way?"

"Robert Montgomery, the actor."

"Oh, that isn't so bad!" McClenahan admitted. "They say he is making fifty thousand dollars a year."

The female detective took her departure, glowing with satisfaction.

"Number Two is all right! I have succeeded, as in number three, and now for number one, the murder case!" she soliloquized.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MAJOR THINKS IT WILL STORM.

THE case against the gambler, Alexander, was pushed to a speedy trial, and within a week it was concluded.

He was convicted, and sentenced to the State Prison at Joliet for ten years.

In consideration of the Italian's turning state's evidence, and as Florence Valentine had not been at all injured, he was not prosecuted.

The Serio-Comic was now free to give her entire attention to the Glorious Alcazar.

She accounted for her absence by saying that she had been kept away by important business.

From Florence Valentine she received a full account of all that had transpired while she had been away.

"Miss Sutherland has succeeded in getting into a regular flirtation with that old Kentucky major," the skirt dancer explained. "He waits for her now and escorts her home every night."

"Well, I shouldn't think this French man, De Moroy, would like that," the Serio-Comic intimated.

"Oh, he doesn't seem to care, and he and the old major appear to be on the most friendly terms."

"What is Sutherland's little game? I assume that there is a reason for her acting in this way with the old gentleman."

"I don't think there is a doubt about it," was answered. "She is after money, I suppose, and it is my opinion she would not hesitate at any means to secure it, provided she thought there was a good chance that she would not be caught."

"I agree with you in regard to that, for I haven't a good opinion of the woman."

That evening, when the Serio-Comic went into the wine-room, she speedily saw that the statement of the skirt-dancer was correct.

The Kentuckian hardly took any notice of her, but seemed to be fascinated by Miss Sutherland, who, on her part, did her best to entertain the old gentleman.

"By the way, I wish you would give me your advice about a certain matter," Miss Sutherland said, abruptly.

"I shall be glad to do it," the major assented. "In fact, I shall feel honored."

"Ever since I have been in Chicago everybody has been advising me to buy real estate here, if I could only get together a little money to put into a house," she explained.

"Ah, yes; I do not doubt that the advice is good," the major acquiesced. "In truth, I have drawn a few thousand dollars from Kentucky, and put it in the bank here, with the idea of investing it in Chicago property, when I come across a favorable opportunity."

"Well, Mr. De Moroy has kindly been on the lookout for me, and has found a place which he says can be bought very cheap," she informed her admirer.

"That is good!" the old gentleman rejoined. "You must be able to get in on the ground floor, as they call it, if you want to make money by a real estate investment."

"It is a full lot, but the house does not amount to anything, being only one story, with two rooms."

"The lot, of course, is what you are paying the money for."

"Yes; it is only a short distance from here; and the way Mr. De Moroy happened to find it was that the people where he had his room moved, and he had to look out for other quarters," Miss Sutherland explained. "He saw this house advertised—two rooms, furnished, suitable for a bachelor—so he went to see about them."

"Mr. De Moroy is a newspaper man, you know, and as he comes and goes at all sorts of hours, he wanted to get a place where he could enjoy perfect liberty."

"Ah, yes, I understand; these newspaper men are a rare lot of bohemians and usually keep late hours."

"The place belongs to an old lady, a widow, who used to live there before she lost her husband, but now she has gone to live

with her folks and is anxious to get rid of the property."

"Very natural under the circumstances," the old gentleman observed.

"So it can be bought very reasonable, the owner says, but, of course, I am no judge of such a thing and I would like to have you see the property and advise me in regard to it."

"Why, I shall be delighted, I assure you!"

"I am so anxious to know—that is woman-like, of course," she declared with a coquettish toss of her head.

"Oh, very natural—very natural, I am sure," the Kentuckian replied.

"If Mr. DeMoroy should happen to come in to-night I think I will ask him to let me see the house as I go home."

"I don't suppose that you mind acting as my escort," she remarked with a charming smile.

"Certainly not. I shall really be delighted!" the old gentleman declared with a gallant bow.

"Of course Mr DeMoroy may not come in," Miss Sutherland remarked.

"I do not hardly expect him, for it seems to me that last night he said something about going out of town for a couple of days," she added.

"I do not know how that is, for I do not remember to have heard him say anything about the matter."

Just then Miss Sutherland was summoned to the stage, and so was obliged to excuse herself to the major.

Rosamond was sitting at an adjoining table, talking to Billy Dougan, the bones-player.

The Kentuckian sauntered over to the table, and remarked in a casual way that he thought there was going to be a storm.

"Yes, it was clouding up a little when I came in," the bones-player observed.

"I noticed it before I left my house, and so I took the precaution to bring an umbrella, but I rather had an idea that it wouldn't amount to anything."

"Ah, well, when a storm threatens it is always well to be prepared, you know," the Kentuckian remarked with the air of a sage.

"Will you indulge in a little liquid refreshment?" he added.

Of course the performers were only too glad, and in the liberal way characteristic of him, the major ordered a bottle of wine.

After drinking a couple of glasses of wine, Rosamond complained of not feeling well and begged the gentlemen to excuse her.

"Oh, certainly, of course," the Kentuckian replied with his usual gallant bow.

Then the Serio-Comic repaired to the stage department and informed the old stage-manager that she felt so unwell that she would be obliged to go home.

"All right! go ahead!" the veteran responded. "The old Dutchman has cleared out in disgust, so it will make no difference."

"I don't believe there is twenty ducats in the house to-night, and the main guy swears that if the business doesn't pick up next week he will shut up the show."

"Well, I don't wonder at it, for the business has been simply dreadful," the Serio-Comic replied.

Then she went to her dressing-room, assumed her street costume and departed.

Five minutes later she was at a telephone. "Come at once; all are needed!" was the message which she sent.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MAJOR GOES.

THE Kentuckian and the bones-player finished the bottle of wine in short order, and just as they came to the end of it the Frenchman, De Moroy, made his appearance.

The major was delighted to see him, and immediately ordered another bottle of wine, much to the satisfaction of the bones-player, who was not in the habit of coming in contact with a liberal-hearted "angel" of this kind every day.

After disposing of a couple of glasses though, Billy Dougan was summoned to the stage, much to his displeasure, for he would have liked to assist in the finishing of the bottle.

After the bones player departed the Kentuckian spoke about Miss Sutherland's idea.

"Yes, we can arrange it in that way with out any trouble," De Moroy remarked.

"But I say, after we finish the wine let us go in the auditorium and see the performance to an end."

"All right," the major responded.

It did not take the two long to dispose of the rest of the wine, and then they went in the front of the music hall where they remained until the performance ended.

When the curtain descended, and the audience departed, the pair proceeded to the back door of the theater where they waited for the coming of Miss Sutherland.

She soon appeared and then the three set out.

"It is only a half a mile or so away," the Frenchman explained. "So it will not take us long to get there."

The night was quite dark, and it was difficult to distinguish objects a short distance away, but, apparently, the storm had passed over.

The three went on, chatting together.

The wine seemed to put the old major in the best of spirits, for he was full of life and extremely jolly.

As they proceeded he told a number of comic stories, and he never failed to laugh loudly at the jokes.

If any watchers had desired to shadow the three, the Kentuckian's voice would have guided them splendidly.

The way was a rather roundabout one, but the major never took any notice of the direction in which they were going, being too occupied in his story-telling to pay any attention to the surroundings.

"Here we are!" De Moroy announced at last, as he brought the party to a halt in front of one of the little one-story cottages which used to be so common on the outskirts of Chicago.

There was a good-sized lot, and the Kentuckian remarked:

"Well, although the house doesn't amount to much the lot is good."

"The old lady wants two thousand dollars for the place," Miss Sutherland said.

"I certainly think that is a bargain," the Kentuckian declared with the air of an oracle.

"That is just what I told her," the Frenchman observed.

"You would advise me to buy it then?" Miss Sutherland asked.

"Yes, certainly, by all means!" the Kentuckian replied.

"I wouldn't mind getting a chance to invest a few thousand dollars in as good a speculation as I conceive this to be," the old gentleman continued.

"In fact, I don't mind telling you that I always carry with me a couple of thousand dollars, so as to be ready to pay down the cash and bind a bargain."

"Well, it seems to me that you have hit upon an excellent plan," De Moroy remarked.

"But come in and allow me to do the honors," he continued.

"And then you can examine the interior of the house," the Frenchman added.

"It is a comfortable little house, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my quarters."

De Moroy unlocked the door and they entered.

There was a coal-oil lamp burning on the table, in the center of the apartment, which was a sort of a parlor, plainly but neatly furnished.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable," the Frenchman exclaimed.

"This isn't at all bad," the Kentuckian declared, as he placed a chair, in his gallant way, for Miss Sutherland, and then helped himself to another.

"It is a very nice little apartment," the lady remarked.

"And a good, solid spring lock upon the door, too, as a protection against thieves," the major added.

There was a quick exchange of glances between the vocalist and the Frenchman, but as the Kentuckian's eyes were roaming around the room he did not notice the pair.

"Will you allow me to offer you some refreshments, Miss Sutherland? I've some extra good French brandy," De Moroy asked.

"Well, I really think I would like a little

brandy, if it is not putting you to too much trouble," the vocalist replied.

"No, no, no trouble at all!" and from a closet he produced a bottle of brandy and some glasses.

"I suppose you don't mind a little brandy, major?" De Moroy asked.

"Oh, no; I like a little good brandy once in a while, but whisky is my natural food," the old gentleman replied, and then he laughed loudly at his joke.

"Only a little for me, please," Miss Sutherland remarked to the Frenchman, as he prepared to help her to the liquor.

He filled the glass about a quarter full, and then the vocalist cried enough.

"Oh, you haven't got a taste there," the major remarked, as he filled his glass half full.

De Moroy followed his example.

"We will drink success to Miss Sutherland's speculation!" the Kentuckian remarked, rising as he spoke, and bowing politely.

"Thank you!" the vocalist said, with her sweetest smile, and as she raised the glass to her lips she rose to her feet, hitting against De Moroy as she did so, and the liquor in both their glasses was spilled.

"Oh, excuse me, I pray!" Miss Sutherland exclaimed. "How awkward it was of me to do that!"

"Go ahead, major, drink hearty! Don't wait for us!" De Moroy urged, hastening to refill the glasses.

"Hold on! there's somebody at the door!" the Kentuckian exclaimed, and before either of his companions could say anything, he hastened to the door and threw it open.

Into the room came Joe Phenix's lieutenant, Tony Western, the Serio-Comic Detective, now in her youth's disguise, and a couple of policemen in uniform.

Miss Sutherland and the Frenchman started in surprise.

"You are my prisoners!" Tony Western declared, and the policemen immediately snapped handcuffs on the wrists of both the vocalist and De Moroy.

"Of what are we accused?" the Frenchman demanded.

"Murder!"

"It is absurd!" De Moroy cried.

"Oh, no! I accuse you two of the murder of Marshall Berkeley, and I have no doubt that if we had not arrived as we did, you, sir, would have fallen a victim, for that liquor is probably drugged!"

"I am astounded!" the major declared.

"It is outrageous! and you will have to answer for this!" De Moroy protested, indignantly.

"Take them away!" Tony Western commanded.

The policemen removed the twain, who went out into the night, dazed by the force of the stroke which had been so suddenly dealt them.

As soon as the door closed behind the prisoner, a complete change took place in the major's manner.

"We have them caged securely!" he cried. "And now, if we can only find proof to bring the crime home to them, our triumph will be complete."

It was the veteran detective, Joe Phenix himself, who spoke. The merciless man-hunter, disguised as the Kentuckian, had fulfilled his mission.

"Bravo! So far we have succeeded admirably," the Serio-Comic Detective declared. "We have trapped our game, and the chances are we can secure proof enough that they committed the crime to be able to convict them."

"So it looks, now. A search of the house may disclose something which will be of service to us, but we will defer that until morning, when we will have daylight to aid us."

"I told the chief I would notify him if we bagged the birds, and he is to come in the morning to superintend the search."

"It is always policy, in a case of this kind, to work in connection with the local officers," the veteran Hawkshaw explained.

"It is wise, for if you did not their pride would be wounded, and you could not count upon their hearty co-operation," the acute female crook-chaser remarked.

"Correct!" the veteran asserted. "and one of the principal reasons, I believe, why I have

been successful in a number of complicated cases is because I took pains at the beginning to secure the assistance of the local officers."

"You were wise."

"I am going to remain here in charge of the house, but there isn't any necessity for your staying."

"Very well; I will return in the morning."

"Yes, do so. The chief of police will, probably, be on hand in good season, for when I explained what sort of a game I was going to play, he said he would make it a point to get to his office about seven o'clock in the morning so that if I succeeded in capturing my game he would be able to come at an early hour to superintend the searching of the premises."

"He evidently takes a great interest in the matter."

"Yes, he does, for in the first place, he has been very much annoyed because none of his detectives have been able to do anything with this Marshall Berkeley case."

"He regards it as a reflection upon his ability, and therefore, when I told him I thought the chances were good that I would be able to capture the parties who murdered the Englishman he was delighted and told me that if I needed aid to call upon him and he would gladly assist me to the extent of his power."

"It was kind of him, and yet natural under the circumstances."

"I took pains to explain to the chief, too, how I proposed to work this game," the veteran added. "I told him I had arranged to make the arrest at night, at so late an hour that none of the neighbors would be apt to know anything about it, I explained, too, that I had taken measures so that it will not be possible for the reporters to get the particulars in time to get an account of the arrests in the morning papers."

"It is likely this precious pair have accomplices, and if no report of the affair is published, to frighten them off, some of the rogues may come to the house and I can get a chance at them."

"That is probable," the assistant replied, in a thoughtful way.

"Although the birds are caged yet it may be a different matter to get evidence enough to convict them unless we can secure some accomplice to turn State evidence."

"If three or four are concerned in a crime and all are captured, some one of the party will be sure to give the rest of the party away in order to save himself."

"The old story: self-preservation is nature's first law."

"I have instructed Tony Western to return as soon as he lodges the Frenchman and the woman in jail, and to bring disguises for both of us," Joe Phenix informed the woman.

"I proceed on the idea that if the pair had accomplices it is likely they know of this scheme to rob the Kentuckian, so, of course, if they found the Kenuckian in possession of the premises, and their pals gone, their suspicions would be immediately excited. Therefore, if I can persuade the rogues that I am a pal of the Frenchman I may entrap them into admissions which will be of value."

"That seems likely. Well, I will be off. At what time shall I see you to-morrow, and where?"

"At the office of the chief of police at twelve, noon," Joe Phenix replied. "I will either meet you there, or send instructions if I am detained and unable to come."

"Very well; I will be on hand," and the female detective departed.

Joe Phenix took possession of a comfortable rocking-chair, lit a cigar and smoked until Tony Western made his appearance, bearing in hand a valise which contained the disguises.

It did not take long for these two experienced man-hunters to transform themselves, and soon all vestige of the acute detective and the jolly Kentuckian disappeared.

A rather shabby Englishman, and a disreputable appearing Frenchman took their places.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DISCOVERY.

THERE is not much probability of anybody putting in an appearance to-night," Joe

Phenix observed after the transformation was completed.

"I hardly think there is," Western assented.

"We may as well make ourselves comfortable then. This lounge will do for me, and there must be a bedroom somewhere for your accommodation."

"I will soon see about that!" Tony Western decided.

There were two doors in the room besides the one which led to the street, and an examination showed that one led to a kitchen and the other to a bedroom, which Tony soon appropriated.

"I will leave the lamp burning so that if the rogues do come it will lead them in," Joe Phenix explained.

"It is half-past one," Tony Western observed, consulting his watch.

"Not likely, then, that anybody will come to-night," the veteran inferred—which was correct, for not a soul came near the house.

The man-hunters were up betimes in the morning, and when they explored the kitchen they found ample materials for a breakfast, of which they did not hesitate to avail themselves.

After the meal they awaited in patience the arrival of the chief of police.

At half-past seven the official put in an appearance. He congratulated Phenix upon the successful result of his plans.

"I hope you have got evidence enough so that the pair cannot slip through the meshes of the law," the chief said.

"I will have to admit that the evidence is not particularly strong," Joe Phenix replied. "Under the peculiar circumstances it was not possible to do much. But, I have secured proof that the missing man was on familiar terms with both the Frenchman and the woman, and was in their company a short time before he disappeared so mysteriously."

"That is good, and if you can prove that both were birds of prey the inference is natural that they made away with him so as to be able to get at his valuables," the chief of police remarked.

"Yes; and my idea is if we search this house we will secure evidence that the two were instrumental in causing the death of the Englishman."

"The supposition is a likely one," the official assented. "Murderers have been known to carefully preserve the weapon with which the deed was done, and that weapon played a prominent part in securing their conviction."

"There are hundreds of such cases in the records!" the chief of police declared. "And if criminals were not in the habit of making these stupid blunders it would be almost impossible for the officers of the law to apprehend them."

"But now, we will set to work. Let me see! It is your idea that the man was decoyed to this house and here murdered?"

"That is the way I figure it out," the veteran replied.

"How about the body?"

"It must have been disposed of in the house," Joe Phenix answered.

"You are probably correct about that, for it would be a difficult matter for them to get the body out of the house and dispose of it, if the man was killed here."

"I examined the records of the Morgue, and no unknown body has been received there which at all corresponded with the description given of the Englishman."

"That was the course that I pursued when the brother came to me and made known the fact that his relative had so mysteriously disappeared," the official remarked.

"It is an easy matter to commit a murder, but an extremely difficult one to get rid of the body of the victim," Joe Phenix suggested; "so I think the chances are a hundred to one that the remains were disposed of on the premises here."

"Probably buried in the cellar," the chief of police suggested.

"Yes, and quick-lime deposited around the body, so as to reduce it to nothingness as soon as possible."

"Very likely indeed," the chief of police acquiesced.

The three proceeded to make an examination. In the kitchen they found a trap-door, and when this was opened a flight of steps was revealed.

Investigation disclosed a lantern in the kitchen closet. This was lighted and the three descended to the cellar.

It was a small apartment under the kitchen only.

In the cellar a spade stood against the wall, and after a careful inspection, the searchers came to the conclusion that the earth had been recently disturbed in one corner.

"If we dig here I should not be surprised if we found something," the chief of police observed.

Tony Western at once set to work, proceeding carefully, and soon laid bare a human skeleton!

"The bones of the unfortunate Englishman," the chief of police decided.

Joe Phenix assented.

"Do not disturb the remains," commanded the official. "Allow them to remain in the earth until the coroner arrives so that he can take charge of the case."

"Now we will search the house, for the criminals may have been careless enough to retain some of the dead man's property."

The three quitted the cellar and proceeded to make a careful search; but they only had their labor for their pains, as no discoveries were made.

"I will go to the nearest telephone and notify the coroner," the chief of police observed after the search was finished.

The official did so, and in about half an hour the coroner arrived with his assistants.

The remains were carefully removed, and when it was noticed that some of the teeth were filled with gold the coroner suggested that it was probable this fact would lead to the identification of the bones.

After the coroner and his assistants departed the chief of police questioned Joe Phenix as to what he intended to do.

The veteran explained that he proposed to remain in the house in the hope to entrap some accomplice, of the two crooks.

"Use the house as a sort of a rat-trap, eh?"

"Yes, that is the idea."

"I should not be surprised if the pair did have accomplices for the transatlantic crooks generally work in gangs," the chief observed.

"Well, if you do succeed in nabbing anybody you can call me up through the telephone."

Joe Phenix replied that he would send notice immediately, and then the official departed, leaving the New Yorkers to their watch.

CHAPTER XLI.

A VISITOR.

JOE PHENIX had arranged the blinds of the front windows so he could keep an eye upon any one who applied for admission without being seen.

After the departure of the chief he took a seat by the window so as to keep watch on the street.

"It may be possible that we will have our trouble for nothing," the veteran remarked.

"It is worth trying," Tony Western replied.

"Yes, for when a man sets out to trap a pair of such expert rogues as these two certainly are we cannot afford to throw away a single point in the game."

"And, by the way, perhaps it would be a good idea for you to keep out of sight if any one comes," Joe Phenix added, after a moment's pause.

"If the man is an unusually sly rogue he might take the alarm upon finding two strangers here."

"It is very likely," Tony Western assented. "There is a large closet in the bedroom and I can conceal myself in it. By leaving the bedroom door ajar I will be able to overhear all that is said, and if you should happen to need me I can come at a moment's warning."

"I think that is the best way to work the game," the great Gotham detective asserted.

Then Phenix's attention was attracted by a peculiar-looking man crossing the street and coming directly toward the house.

He was an under-sized fellow, who had the appearance of a foreigner, a Frenchman apparently, for he had dark hair and eyes, a swarthy skin and his upper lip and chin

were ornamented by a bristling mustache and imperial. He was dressed in shabby-genteel style; his clothes, a checked suit, loud in pattern, and his high-crowned, Alpine style hat was worn in a rakish manner on one side of his head.

"Here is our man, I think!" Joe Phenix exclaimed as soon as he got a good view of the fellow.

"A shabby-genteel foreigner, one of the kind who passes himself off as being the younger son of a noble house, but who is usually, a sharper of the first water."

"I will get out!" Tony Western exclaimed, and he immediately retreated to the closet in the bedroom.

Joe Phenix had not made any mistake for the man came directly to the door and pulled the bell.

The veteran answered the summons.

A look of surprise appeared on the face of the applicant when he saw Joe Phenix.

It must be remembered that the detective was disguised, so that he, too, bore the appearance of a foreigner.

"You are to come in and wait," the disguised detective said before the other could open his mouth, greeting him with a beaming smile.

And, as soon as he made the announcement, Phenix stepped to one side so that the other could enter.

There was a look of suspicion on the face of the stranger as he entered the hall. He evidently did not know what to make of this reception.

Phenix closed the door and, with an excellent imitation of the florid style of the true Frenchman, led the way into the sitting-room and pressed the other to be seated.

"The captain will soon be back," he explained.

"He had some business to which he must give attention, and just as he was departing he told me that it was likely a visitor might come, one of the right sort he declared, and begged me to do the honor, so take a chair, my dear friend, and make yourself as comfortable as possible."

The new-comer took a seat by the table, but from the look on his face it was evident that he was extremely puzzled.

"Will you have a little brandy, eh?" asked the detective, bustling up to the closet, and bringing out the bottles and glasses.

There was a sudden gleam of light in the eyes of the other and from the expression on his face the detective concluded that the man was fond of liquor.

"Oho!" Joe Phenix mused, "if you are fond of brandy the chances are that I can induce you to drink enough to make you tell me about all you know!"

"Help yourself, my dear friend!" the disguised shadower urged. "There is a bottle full, and if that is not enough there is another one in the closet."

Phenix's sharp eyes had noted that there was a second bottle of brandy when he took down the first one.

"Aha! This looks like good stuff!" the other declared as he poured a liberal amount of the potent fluid into the glass.

"It is the drink divine!" the false Frenchman responded, with true Gallic enthusiasm, as he poured the brandy into his own glass.

"My dear friend, De Moroy, is a noble fellow!" the disguised detective continued. "It was a lucky chance that I encountered him yesterday, for things had not gone well with me since I came to this New World."

"I did not realize my anticipation, you know. It was my thought that fine, fat pigeons could be picked up in the big cities of the United States without any trouble—pigeons, you understand, which would be well worth the plucking."

"And you were disappointed, eh?" asked the other, helping himself to more brandy, and pushing the bottle over to the other who had seated himself on the opposite side of the table.

"Ah, yes; I found there wasn't any more chances for business here than in the European capitals," Joe Phenix replied, refilling his glass as he spoke.

"Then, as a last resource, I came to Chicago, thinking that, in a city filled with so many strangers there might be a chance for a man of genius like myself."

"Well, there are some pigeons here, of course, but there are also lots of hawks."

"Too true! and when I made the discovery I was desolated!" the man hunter exclaimed with a capital assumption of comic despair, and he shoved the brandy bottle over to the other.

The visitor was not slow to refill his glass again, and Phenix promptly followed his example.

In a game of this kind the veteran could hold his own with almost anybody, for he had a head like iron, and liquor had but little power over him.

"Not many chances to take good tricks," the other asserted in a confidential way.

The liquor was beginning to take effect upon him, and the appearance of distrust which he had exhibited was gradually disappearing.

"No, very few chances!" the detective repeated, with a shake of the head. "It has been as much as I could do to get along, and I was about despairing when I met De Moroy to-day."

"He and I are old pals, you understand; many a good stroke of business have we done in the old world together. A great captain is De Moroy, *mon ami*! Ah! what a magnificent head to plan! And what nerve and resolution to execute!"

By this time the other had emptied his glass, and the detective again pushed the bottle over to him.

One peculiar fact about this drinking bout was that the stranger kept increasing the quantity of brandy which he took, while the detective as steadily decreased his own allowance.

"Yes, yes; he is a genius in his way," the other asserted.

"And the madame, too! Ah! what a woman she is!"

"Yes, she is very clever—very!"

"A magnificent pair, eh, *mon ami*?"

"Very true; well matched!"

"You would have to look a long time, my brave, to find their equals!" the man-hunter declared, in a tone of profound conviction.

"That is correct."

"The captain told me that he thought he could find something for me to do. He said he had one good man working with him, and he described you so exactly that I recognized you the moment I set eyes on your face."

"He told me your name, too; but—presto! I have such a poor memory for names!" and the speaker tapped his forehead as though he was very much perplexed.

"Michael Francisco I am called," the other announced, again paying his respects to the brandy bottle.

"Ah, yes; but that was not what he called you," Joe Phenix replied, going upon the idea that the man had a nickname; and that, if the chief plotter spoke of him to one of the crooked fraternity, he would be more apt to call him by his nickname than by his rightful appellation.

"Was it French Mike?"

"Yes, yes; that was it!" the detective averred.

It was a bold game which the man-hunter had played, and it was succeeding to perfection.

"And the captain spoke so highly of you, too," Joe Phenix went on. "He told me that you and he had worked some big games together."

"Oh, yes; we have done a trick or two which amounted to something!" French Mike assumed in a boastful way.

"So he said; and he told me that he had one on hand now—one which he intended to carry out last night but things were not favorable and so the game could not be worked."

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed the Frenchman, now well under the influence of liquor. "I am sorry to hear that the game did not go through!"

"Things were not favorable, you understand, and so the captain did not think it was prudent to proceed."

"Well, that was all right, of course."

"This Kentuckian is a shrewd old customer, you know; he is wary and sly, and the game must be worked in the most careful manner or his suspicions will be excited."

"The captain knows how to pull the

wires, no man understands the game better," French Mike declared, nodding his head with drunken gravity.

"The Kentuckian will turn out to be a pigeon worth plucking, the captain thinks, and so he is willing to take a great deal of trouble over the matter," the detective intimated.

"The captain is wise not to run any risks. Slow and sure, that is my motto!" the other explained, helping himself to the last of the brandy as he spoke, and then shoving the bottle across the table to Phenix.

"Oho! it is empty!" the Gothamite exclaimed.

"But it does not matter, for there is another bottle," and he hastened to bring it from the closet.

"It is good! I have a terrible thirst on me, and I feel as if I could drink a gallon!" the foreign crank declared.

"There is no drink in this world like good brandy!" the detective asserted as he filled French Mike's glass to the brim.

CHAPTER XLII.

A CONFESSION.

THE dull eyes of the crook sparkled as he raised the glass to his lips.

"This is the stuff to put life into a man!" he affirmed.

"Your health, my friend," he continued, with an elaborate bow, which the detective acknowledged with one equally as polite.

"You are made of the right stuff!" French Mike declared. "You are not afraid to help yourself to the brandy, or to give it to me."

"Oh, no, because I know that a river of it would not do me any harm, and I am sure that a man like yourself has a head of iron, and so a few glasses of brandy will not do you any damage."

"Certainly not! Brandy is like mother's milk to me; but the captain has queer ideas, you know."

"De Moroy is a great man, you understand. I would not for the world say anything against the captain, but it is no harm for me to remark that he is too cautious at times."

"That is true; no doubt about it," the detective assented.

"He has got a stupid idea in his head that I am too fond of liquor—that I cannot be trusted to keep a quiet tongue in my head if I take a few drinks of brandy!" the crook confessed in a tone which showed that he was much grieved to think that any one should have such an opinion of him.

"Oh, *mon Dieu*! how can it be possible that so shrewd a man as the captain could make such a mistake?" the false Frenchman exclaimed, with uplifted hands.

"It is strange that he should fall into such an error," French Mike averred.

"Why, the more I drink the more close-mouthed I become!"

"Certainly! there is no doubt about that!" the detective assented. "I am astonished that a man like De Moroy could be guilty of making such a mistake. Now you are almost a stranger to me, but I am satisfied from what I have seen of you that it would not be possible for you to drink liquor enough to make you forget your caution."

"Oh, yes; but he is terribly alarmed lest I should get too much brandy on board and then so far forget myself as to blab in regard to his secrets," French Mike grumbled.

"And there is not the least danger of your doing such a thing!"

"No, not the slightest!"

"But as I said, *mon brave* captain likes to talk himself," the detective declared, and he refilled the other's glass. "Now, this very morning, not two hours ago, in this room, over a glass of brandy, he explained to me how he and the madame had been working some great schemes here in Chicago."

"Told me, you understand, all about this Kentuckian, how the madame had succeeded in entrapping him, just as she did the Englishman—"

"Thunder and lightning!" French Mike exclaimed in astonishment; then he laid back in his chair and blinked in drunken wonder, at the other.

"You don't mean to say that he told you anything about the *Englishman*?"

"Why, certainly! He wasn't afraid to trust an old pal like myself. In fact, he

was glad of a chance to boast a little about the affair to a man whom he knew he could trust.

"Oh, yes; I can understand that. It is natural, although he is always warning me to be careful and not drink too much for fear I may talk."

"It was a splendid game—that one with the Englishman—and I do not wonder the captain is proud of it."

"Oh, yes, it worked to perfection."

"And this one with the Kentuckian will undoubtedly go through all right, too, but the captain does not think he will get as much money out of it as he did out of the other."

"No, I do not think he will, and I can tell you, my friend, just as I have told the captain, this American is not as soft as the Englishman, and it will not be so easy a job to get at him as it was at the other."

"Of course, I do not know, for I never saw either of them, but De Moroy seemed to be confident that the scheme would go through all right."

"It may; I am not saying that it will not, but I repeat he is not as soft as the Englishman was."

"I should judge that you are right about that from what the captain said."

"How splendidly that game worked!" the wily persuader exclaimed, rubbing his hands together, gleefully; "and what a brilliant idea it was of the captain to dispose of the body by burying it in the cellar in the quicklime," lowering his voice and speaking in a cautious tone.

French Mike was amazed.

"You don't mean to say that the captain told you all about it?" he exclaimed.

"Of course! Why should he not?" the other replied, pretending to be much surprised.

"Am I not an old pal? Has not the captain and myself done a dozen jobs in Europe, in all of which we ran the risk of the scaffold, and the executioner?"

"Well, it isn't any wonder, then, that he was not afraid to talk to you about the matter," French Mike remarked.

"He has perfect confidence in me, of course. Why should he not have, when he knows that twenty times at least I have been tried in the fire and not found wanting?"

"Yes, yes."

"And he told me, too, how he arranged to get at the money of the Englishman."

"Didn't he say that I played my part to perfection?" French Mike demanded.

"Oh, yes! He declared that it would not be possible for any one to work the trick better than you did."

"I am one of the best actors in the world when it comes to assuming a disguise, and playing a part, particularly that of an Englishman or an American," French Mike boasted.

"And that is something that De Moroy cannot do at all."

"When it came to getting the money on the paper, the captain did the 'scratching'—the writing of the name, you understand, and I attended to the 'laying down'."

"De Moroy is an expert penman, and able to imitate almost any kind of handwriting, so he made a splendid job out of the signature."

"Ah, yes, of course; I know what he can do in that line."

"And I played my part so well that no one had any suspicion that all was not right. It went through beautifully."

"Yes, so the captain said; but he also told me that he had great difficulty in getting rid of the jewelry," the disguised Phenix remarked in a careless way.

"That is true; but that was because there was only one man in Chicago whom we dared trust."

"Did the old Jew drive a hard bargain with you?" the spy asked, making a guess at the truth.

"Oh, yes; the miserable old scoundrel!"

"Let me see," the spy said in a reflective way. "De Moroy said that his office was on Clark street, I believe?"

"He took pains, you see, to explain to me that though the old fellow was a miserly scoundrel, who never gives a fair price, yet he is a good man to do business with because he can be trusted."

"Oh, yes; old Swaggenheim is all right!"

He wouldn't give much for the stuff, for he said he would have to hide it away for six months or so before he would be able to get rid of it."

Phenix now having gained his point, summoned Tony Western, and the handcuffs were quickly on the wrists of the astonished crook.

He was conveyed to the jail, and then with the chief of police, and his detectives, Phenix paid a visit to the old Jew "fence's" place of business, and though the aged rascal declared he knew nothing about the matter, the sleuth-hounds proceeded to hunt for the jewelry of the murdered Englishman.

The search was a successful one, and ample proof to convict the pair of murder was secured.

The lost Englishman had been decoyed to the house and killed by poisoned liquor.

Investigation revealed that the vocalist and the Frenchman were man and wife, fugitives from Europe, where they had made a business of decoying wealthy men to their death.

In the New World, though, they had come to the end of their career, and in due time the pair were tried, convicted, and executed.

And thus another deep and dark mystery had been cleared up by that king of man-hunters, Joe Phenix, assisted by Mignon Lawrence his Mascot, in the disguise of the Serio-Comic Singer.

THE END.

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